**Caring for your Giant African Land Snail**

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If you are new to snail keeping or just wish to brush up on a few tips, you will find this document highly useful. Feel free to download it, print it, and share it.

**Snail selection**

First things first, you are interested in keeping snails as pet’s but don’t know which type or how many. Firstly ask yourself do you want just the one to cherish and watch grow or do you want more than one? If you get more than one, even different breeds, they can and most likely will breed and produce possibly hundreds of babies so that's something to consider. Even with just the one snail there is still a very small chance of himself fertilizing and producing eggs. Also what type do you get? Well there are several different types of breeds out there, all with different care requirements, but we will concentrate this guide on the most common type, the East African Land snail - Achatina fulica.

**Housing**

Snail homes can be as cheap or as expensive as you’re willing to pay. For the cheapest option, you can use plastic storage boxes. These are cost effective and can provide a lot of space for the snail/s. You can always go for the glass tank aquarium option as well, which do tend to look a lot nicer, in my opinion, but do cost a lot more to start with and not as moveable as the storage boxes. As for the size of the tank it depends on how many snails you have and how big it can potentially grow to. Ideally the more space you can provide the better for the snail/s.

Once you have the enclosure you need to fill it. All snails need and appreciate substrate in which to bury themselves, lay eggs in and generally make a mess with. You must **NEVER** use soil out of your garden. This will be full of chemicals, bugs, parasites and who knows what else. It could prove fatal to the snails and if it doesn’t then it just turns to mud. You can use general purpose compost available at all garden centres. Make sure it hasn't been treated with any chemicals and doesn’t include any added fertilizers. Or you can use coir substrate. This usually comes in back block and you add a set amount of water to it and it will expand and loosen and 1 block can make up to 10 litres of substrate to use as you wish. I find with coir, it is much better at holding the moisture in the tank without becoming too moist and my snails seem to prefer it. Whichever option you choose you should try and clean them out at least once a week with just a spot cleaning and try to avoid a full clean out, until really needed, as snails do like their homes slightly dirty. They like the substrate to be quite deep at least 3 inches, for them to bury in and lay eggs in.

They don’t really need water, as they get all their water from humidity, spraying and food, but you can add a small water dish. They do appreciate a nice drink now and again and will sometimes just sit in the water dish for a bath. Just make sure it's not deep enough to drown themselves in. For decoration in the tank, though not entirely necessary, you can add a flower pot on its side, to give them something to hide in. or use cork bark, tree branches, plastic plants, moss, some select safe live plants - these will be eaten though.

**Feeding**

Snails are quite easy to feed. They can eat everything from the fruit and veg family except citrus foods, anything from the onion family. They will of course have their favorites from those so you will learn which they prefer best. Each snail can be quite unique in what they will and won't eat. Some will be dust bins and eat anything you put down for them. Some will be fussy eaters and will only eat certain foods. They will also need a constant calcium supply such as cuttlefish bone, which they will eat when they feel the need to. Ideally you should change this for a fresh one each week. Snails are also omnivores when given the chance. They need protein in their diets which can come in several forms. They like fish flakes, raw mince, raw chicken, animal bones, egg shells and raw egg. They should only be fed these as a treat once in a while.

**Breeding**

When it comes to snails and breeding, especially with fulica snails, it can be very easy to breed, and sometimes can become a struggle to find homes for all of the babies they will produce. Some breeds can take longer to breed and some will only produce a handful of eggs, but with the fulica they can breed from 6 months of age, if big enough, and will lay hundreds of eggs at a time.

Sometimes you may even see the two snails mating. You will see them joined together at the head via these long, white tubes, that come out and join with the other snail’s genitals and then they are joined together for a few hours. They are both exchanging sperm with each other, as most snails are male and female. Once this process is complete, they can give birth to eggs a week later, or 6 months later. It just depends until the snails feels happy with the conditions as to when they will release the eggs. You can see heavily pregnant snail’s eggs, through their breathing hole when it is open and they may drop the odd egg here and there. Once they are happy to lay, they tend to bury themselves in the soil and lay all their eggs in a neat pile under the soil and cover them up. They do this, otherwise other snails in the tank would quite happily eat them, for the extra calcium they contain in their egg shells.

Collect any eggs you find and keep the eggs in a separate tank and cover lightly with some of the substrate. Spray them once every couple of days. Could take a week to hatch or a couple of months. Keep them in similar temps to the parents. Once hatched they are small, white, and see through almost. They don’t eat or move or do much for the first couple of days, but after that they can start to eat fruit and veg – soft fruits and veg. They will eat their egg shells which provide a vital boost of calcium to help start growing. Once they have had their first meal, their shells start to darken up and will start to grow. They follow the same rule as the adults, the more space they have the faster they will grow. It’s up to you what you want to do with them. If you don’t want the hassle then when you find eggs, you can freeze them to kill them in a humane way. Or grow them on and give away to friends or relatives. You must **never** release them into the wild. They wouldn’t survive our winters and could upset the balance and put pressure on other animals for food.

**Looking after**

To look after your snails is simple enough, just feed them most days, and take out the old food to stop it rotting. Clean them out once a week with spot cleaning and spray them every day with a misting spray bottle you can buy in most stores. They need the mist to help keep the humidity in the air, and for general drinking purposes. It also wakes them up if they are being lazy!

Depending on the breed they may need a heat mat. Some breeds need it warmer than others, but for fulica they like it at 21-23 degrees. During summer months that should be easy to achieve, but in winter you may need a heat mat to help reach these temps, to be used with a thermostat. You will need to place the heat mat either on the bottom or along the side of the tank but only cover half of the tank. This way they have a warm side and a colder side to go to, if it gets too warm for them.

**Hope you enjoy reading this. Good luck!**