



Praying Mantis

Getting Started

- Hatching your praying mantises is easy!
- Open up the habitat and lay egg cases on the bottom. Make sure the habitat is zipped tight.
- In warm temperatures (70° to 90° F), nymphs (young mantises) will wiggle out of their cases in two to eight weeks.
- Dozens of tiny nymphs will emerge within a few hours. For the first hour or two, while their soft exoskeletons harden, they are not active.



- If your nymphs don't emerge after eight weeks, put the egg cases in the refrigerator overnight. Return them to the habitat and allow them another three weeks.
- *Optional.* Place a large twig in your habitat, leaning against the side. Use a needle to insert thread through one side of an egg case and tie the case to the twig. Repeat with the second case. When nymphs emerge, they will suspend from the cases on silken strands and descend to the ground. This is fun to watch and worth the extra trouble.

Caring for Fruit Flies

- You will need lots of fruit flies to feed hungry nymphs.
- You have received two large tubes, one filled with fruit flies (wingless), the other filled with food.
- Keep flies in the first container for a full week.
- At the end of the week, transfer them to your mantis habitat: (1) remove stopper from food container, put in a tablespoon of water (enough to make a paste) and place on its side in the habitat; (2) place the vial of fruit flies on its side in the habitat and remove stopper; (3) quickly

zip the habitat closed.

- The fruit fly food will last four weeks. When it runs out, place a slice of apple or banana in the habitat. Replace fruit whenever it dries out.
- If you are concerned that all the flies have died, you probably have eggs that will hatch more (fruit flies have approximately a 48 hour life span). You can also put some sliced apple or banana outside to attract more and put them in the habitat.

Caring for Nymphs

- Within hours after they emerge from their egg case, nymphs will begin eating fruit flies.
- Place a bottle cap full of water in habitat. Refill frequently.
- Watch carefully. When nymphs run out of flies—or even when they don't—they will eat each other! This is one way that praying mantises are adapted to their environments. A few survive to reproduce.
- If you let nature take its course, you will soon have about a dozen large, well-fed nymphs in your habitat.
- Now is the time to release these healthy

nymphs or begin collecting more insects to feed them.

Release

- To release, take the habitat outdoors, unzip, and gently shake nymphs onto leafy plants.
- Many gardeners and organic farmers use praying mantises for natural pest control because they eat insects that harm plants and crops.
- *Optional:* Keep several nymphs for two or three weeks. Try to reserve some flies for them. As nymphs grow, they will need larger and larger amounts of food. Buy crickets at your local pet store or catch any insects that happen to be buzzing around the house: moths, caterpillars, flies, large black ants, beetles, termites, crickets, grasshoppers, and katydids make good mantis food.
- Mantises respond to the movement of live prey. Dead insects will not attract them.



Praying Mantis Life Cycle

- **Egg.** In autumn, a female praying mantis lays 50 to 200 eggs in a foamy brown egg

case, called an ootheca (oh-uh-THEH-kuh). The ootheca hardens to protect the eggs from predators and harsh winter weather. The female mantis dies after laying her eggs.

- **Nymph.** In spring, tiny mantises hatch, pushing through thin channels in the ootheca. They are called nymphs, and they look like miniature adults without wings. Soon their soft exoskeletons harden and they begin to hunt for food.
- **Adult.** By late summer, nymphs have grown to 3 or 4 inches long and developed wings. They catch large insects like crickets or grasshoppers every day. A male and female praying mantis mate and if the female is hungry, she eats her mate! The female deposits her fertilized eggs in an ootheca using the ovipositor on her abdomen. Laying her eggs can take 3 to 5 hours.
- This process is called *incomplete metamorphosis*.



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