

# Land Snail

**Species:** *aspera*  
**Genus:** *Helix*  
**Family:** Helicidae  
**Order:** Stylommatophora  
**Class:** Gastropoda  
**Phylum:** Mollusca  
**Kingdom:** Animalia



## Conditions for Customer Ownership

We hold permits allowing us to transport these organisms. To access permit conditions, [click here](#).

**Never purchase living specimens without having a disposition strategy in place.**

Land snails can only be sold to customers in California or to customers who have their own, approved USDA permit for the importation of land snails (*Helix*). Land snails are a non-native species in North America and the USDA classifies them as a plant pest because they feed on agricultural crops. With the exception of California, all other states require an approved USDA permit for the importation of land snails. Many areas have quarantines established for preventing the importation of the snails. In order to protect the environment, you must house your land snails in escape proof containers. **Under no circumstances should you release land snails into the wild.** When your land snail study is complete, you may dispose of them by collecting the snails in a plastic bag and placing the bag in the freezer for 48 hours. Dispose of frozen snails in the garbage.

## Primary Hazard Considerations

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling land snails. Not for human consumption.

## Availability

Since these snails are collected rather than bred in the laboratory, availability may be limited during the winter and summer. Snails hibernate during the winter (typically October through April in the Northern Hemisphere) and may also estivate in the summer in drought conditions. During dry and cold weather, the opening of the shell is sealed with a thin membrane of dried mucus known as an epiphragm, which helps the snail retain moisture.

## Arrival & Requirements

- *Helix* land snails will arrive in a ventilated plastic container with moist paper towel. Upon arrival, you should place your land snails in a new home as soon as possible. If your habitat is not ready, you may store them in the refrigerator for about two months with feeding and misting. Your snails may arrive and appear dead; if they are inactive, simply spray with water and they should become active.
- The adult bears a hard, thin calcareous shell 25–40 mm in diameter and 25–35 mm high, with four or five whorls. The shell is somewhat variable in color and shade but is generally dark brown or chestnut with yellow stripes, flecks, or streaks.
- The body is soft and slimy, brownish-gray, and is retracted entirely into the shell when the animal is inactive or threatened.
- During times of activity the head and foot emerge. The head bears four tentacles, the upper two of which have eyes, and the lower two of which are smaller, tactile and olfactory sensory structures. The tentacles can be retracted into the head. The mouth is located beneath the tentacles, and contains a chitinous radula, which the snail uses to scrape and manipulate food particles.

## Captive Care

### Habitat:

House snails at room temperature in an escape-proof container with holes for adequate ventilation. You can house about 12 snails in a five-gallon tank or container. Snails will eat paper; do not store them in a paper box or container. A plastic box, plastic cage, or a glass aquarium with a lid will work well. Snails are strong; make sure that the lid of your container is secure. Line the snail enclosure with leaves, bark, soil, or similar substrate and provide damp paper towels for moisture. Snails will eat paper towels, so add more as needed. The enclosure should be cleaned once per week. Clean the sides with a soft moist sponge without soap and replace substrate as needed. Snails are nocturnal and like to hide during the day. Provide ceramic or plastic plant pots or other hiding places for your snails.

### Care:

- **Food:** The land snail is herbivorous and will eat a wide variety of plants. In the wild, snails damage numerous types of fruit trees, vegetable crops, garden flowers, and grain crops. In captivity, land snails should have a continuous food supply and thrive on a varied diet. Snails will eat most types of fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Wash all food before offering it to snails and remove old food daily. Portion size is relevant to the quantity of snails you have. A package of 12 snails will consume about two leaves of lettuce a day. Snails also need a source of calcium for shell growth and maintenance. To provide calcium, feed snails commercial iguana food (with added calcium), sprinkle fruit and vegetables offered with a powdered calcium supplement, or provide cuttlebone or white chalk in the enclosure, available at most pet stores.
- **Water:** Keep snails moist by misting their enclosure and paper towel at least once per day.

## Information

- **Method of reproduction:** *Helix* land snails are hermaphroditic, and produce both spermatozoa and ova. Land snails perform a courtship ritual before mating and reciprocally inseminate each other to fertilize each other's eggs. Each brood may consist of up to 100 eggs.
- **Determining sex:** Hermaphroditic (see above)

## Life Cycle

*Helix* land snails bury their eggs in shallow topsoil primarily while the weather is warm and damp. The snail's shell develops while it is still an embryo but it is very weak, and needs an immediate supply of calcium. The young emerge from the eggs after about two weeks, and take one to two years to reach reproductive maturity. Newly hatched snails obtain calcium by eating the egg from which they hatched. The young are almost completely transparent and colorless. After a few weeks, a snail shell will begin to develop color. Land snails generally live 2–3 years in the wild, but can live much longer in captivity.

## Wild Habitat

*Helix* land snails are native to the Mediterranean region and western Europe, from northwest Africa and Iberia east to Asia Minor, and north to the British Isles. They are found in a wide range of habitats, including gardens, parks, fields, hedgerows and forests. However, this species is very widely introduced and naturalized elsewhere in the world, including North America, where it is considered an invasive pest. Major predators are small mammals, many bird species, lizards, frogs, centipedes, and predatory insects.

## Special Notes

*Helix* land snails have been eaten for thousands of years, beginning in the Pleistocene. In French cuisine, it is known as petit gris, and is served as escargot. The *Helix* land snails are farm-raised or bred as a hobby and enjoyed with garlic butter or cream sauces. Their texture is slightly chewy. The practice of rearing snails for food is known as heliciculture.

## Disposition

When finished with your land snails, collect them in a plastic bag and place the bag in the freezer for 48 hours. After 48 hours in the freezer, dispose of the wrapped snails in the general garbage or according to your school's policy.