

Leeches

A CAROLINA™ CareSheet

Immediate Care and Handling

As soon as your leeches arrive, open the shipping container and inspect them, discarding any dead leeches. Transfer live leeches to glass or plastic containers with secure lids. Leeches are very sensitive to chlorine and copper ions in water, so use spring or pond water only that is 5 to 8 cm deep. Change water as needed. (If you are keeping leeches in culture bowls or other small containers, change the water daily or whenever there is any sign the water is fouling.) Maintain at 15.5 to 21° C (60 to 70° F). (See General Guidelines for more information on water.)

Leeches do not tolerate overcrowding. Ten to 12 leeches can be kept in a 10-gallon aquarium. If keeping leeches in an aquarium, use an airstone or filter, and add elodea or other aquatic plants and some rocks or waterlogged leaves as hiding places. Do not add fish or other animals. Situate the aquarium in a dimly lit area.

Feeding

Leeches can go for months without feeding, especially if kept at cooler temperatures. *Haemopsis* leeches feed on snails, so place some pond snails at the bottom of the aquarium. You can also set up a culture bowl or separate tank with spring water as a feeding chamber. Crush 1 or 2 small aquatic snails in the chamber or chop 1 or more sugar cube-sized fresh beef liver cubes and introduce the leeches. After 1 to 2 hours, return the leeches to the aquarium. Beef liver quickly fouls the water, so discard after use and rinse the container well before reusing. Feed weekly. These feeding methods may not work with the medicinal leech, as it is a more specialized ectoparasite.

FAQs

Are leeches dangerous?

While not considered dangerous to people, a leech bite can become infected and may continue to bleed for 8 hours or longer. We recommend that a qualified medical specialist examine any animal bite.

Why were leeches used in medicine?

A once-popular theory held that disease resulted from an imbalance of fluids in the body. Leeches, supposedly, could restore this balance by removing blood.

Are leeches still used in medicine?

Yes. The medicinal leech has proved valuable for some delicate surgeries.

Can I buy medicinal leeches?

We sell these to schools and businesses only, and we do not ship leeches outside the U.S. The information provided in this CareSheet applies to the educational use of leeches only. Medical professionals should consult more specialized references on the care and handling of *Hirudo verbana*.

How can I feed medicinal leeches?

This isn't practical for most classroom situations. They feed on **very** fresh beef liver.

Problems? We hope not, but if so contact us. We want you to have a good experience.

Orders and replacements: 1-800-334-5551, then select Customer Service.

Technical Support and Questions: caresheets@carolina.com



© 2011 Carolina Biological Supply Company