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TARANTULAS

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Tarantulas

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Wolf spiders were abundant in the fields of Taranto, Italy in the 1400s. Residents of the city believed

that these spiders hunted people, and to prevent death from a spider bite, the cure was to dance. Musicians would play tunes until the victims fell from exhaustion. Villagers believed that the fever was contagious, and so entire villages would dance to protect themselves from this spider. This dance became known as the tarantella, the spider, the tarantula.

The tarantula is not an insect because it has eight legs, not six. It belongs to the arachnid family. The body size of this spider ranges from one to three inches, leg span from five to seven inches. Tarantulas are considered blind because they cannot see objects that are even only six inches from them.

Tarantulas are similar to other spiders and arachnids in that they have no skeleton inside of its body. Instead it has a tough outer skin called the exoskeleton, which holds the spider together. As the spider grows, its internal structure will need more space, and the outer skin will be shed

once a year, a process called molting (baby tarantulas molt three to four times a year). They are found in warm climates such as the west and south, and also in the tropics. The female tarantula can live for twenty years, while the lifespan of a male is much shorter.

These spiders are quiet creatures that live in burrows. They seldom bite unless provoked. The bite of a North American Tarantula (including those found in Mexico) is no more dangerous than the sting of a bee. They can defend themselves by shooting their irritating body hair at a predator.

Tarantulas do not eat solid foods. They use their fangs to puncture their prey's body, and liquefy much of the insides of the victim, then suck the juices out. Tarantulas eat crickets, smaller spiders, grasshoppers, beetles, even mice and other small creatures.

Tarantulas can successfully be kept as pets. When no live insects are available for feeding, jiggle a small piece of meat on a string in front of the spider. The spider will jump on anything that appears to be alive. They can go several months without eating.

Tarantulas can be housed in a small five gallon aquarium tank with a screen cover that can be fastened down securely. Fill the tank with soil or sand to depth of one inch. These spiders are private animals and will need a place to hide. A rock, coffee can (first check for sharp edges), or hollow log section will do the trick. A wet sponge in a dish rather than a bowl of water will be fine for its water supply, to prevent drowning of the spider or its food supply.

Tarantulas make interesting pets, and with proper care will live a long time.