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Feeding Your Insectivorous Reptile

One of the most overlooked aspects of keeping healthy insectivorous reptiles is understanding how to feed them properly in captivity. Wild-caught insects are usually the most nutritious and easily attainable. Be cautious when collecting these insects in areas that may have been sprayed with insecticide. A good way to avoid worrying about insecticide-tainted insects is to make your own "bug catcher." Insert a funnel into the mouth of an old plastic milk jug and attach a hanger through the handle. Then, by hanging it over an outside light, you can catch an abundance of flying insects for your critter to enjoy (you can generally assume that an insect that can fly is not a poisoned bug). Unfortunately, many places are routinely sprayed with pesticides; therefore, crickets purchased at the local pet shops are the most reliable resource. Avoid mealworms as a staple part of the diet as they are high in fat and phosphorus and contain virtually no digestible protein.

When purchasing crickets from a pet store, think of the cricket as an empty capsule that needs to be filled with good nutritious food. Otherwise the cricket is nothing but exoskeleton and offers no nutritional value to your reptile. The easiest and most efficient way of ensuring proper nourishment to your reptile is to purchase a small glass or plastic aquarium and feed your crickets for two to three days before offering these insects to your pet. When choosing the appropriate food to feed your insects, try to keep in mind the natural environment from which your reptile originates and the types of food the insects from that specific area might eat. In general, green leafy vegetables such as collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, and romaine lettuces are all healthy choices for a good source of plant-based protein, as well as an acceptable alternative to water. A source of animal-based protein is also important to provide to your insects, ground up dog food is one of the easiest and affordable sources available.

Vitamin and mineral supplements cannot replace the benefits of natural sunlight!!! Be cautious when using supplements, as there is evidence that oral vitamin D is toxic to diurnal (day-basking) reptiles. Pure calcium (green labeled Rep-cal, ground up chalk, or Tums tablets) can be given safely once or twice a week, but a few hours a week of natural, unfiltered sunlight is definitely the best "supplement" you can offer your reptile.