



Critter Love™

## Sugar Gliders

(Petarus Breviceps)

### Farming Your Own Mealworms for Glider Treats



**Mealworms** are the larva form of the mealworm beetle, *Tenebrio molitor*, a species of darkling beetle. Like all holometabolic insects, they go through four life-stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Larvae typically measure about 2.5 cm or more, whereas adults are generally between 1.25 and 1.8 cm in length. They are enjoyed as treats by many animals including birds, reptiles, and sugar gliders.

To start your own mealworm farm, you will need the following:



**Containers** - get some cheap plastic storage containers. I recommend 2 large ones--one for the worms and one for the beetles, and a smaller one for housing the pupae until they transform into beetles - you can also use the 3-drawer desktop style plastic containers from Wal-Mart or Family Dollar if you prefer.

**Substrate** - oat bran, wheat bran, and corn meal are the most commonly used substrates for mealworms. You can get these things quite easily if you live anywhere near a feed store. You can also order it in 1 or 5 pound containers from Exotic Nutrition or GrubCo.



**Source of Water** - mealworms get their water from their food, so have carrots, apples, or potatoes on hand to place in the substrate. I've found carrots to work the best because they don't dry out as quickly as apple or potato slices, but basically any relatively moist food will work. Just know that you'll have to replace it every few days. You can also choose to use Thirsty Cricket or Mealworm Liquid/Gutload, which can be purchased from Exotic Nutrition or GrubCo.

**Mealworms** - there are a lot of places to get your initial bunch of mealworms. You don't need many to start. You can start with 100 or more, basically. Where you get them is up to you - I suggest GrubCo or Exotic Nutrition, though your locale pet stores or even bait stores may have them as well.

Once you have everything together, just follow these easy steps:

1. Fill one of your large tubs with about 2-3 inches of substrate.
2. Add your mealworms.
3. Add the water source. If your initial colony is small, you'll only need a few slices of potato or whatever you're using. As your colony grows, you'll have to adjust the amount you put in.

That's it! You've got the beginnings of a mealworm farm. Now just keep your colony in a warm (not hot!), dry place and check on them daily to make sure they have fresh, clean vegetable bits and that none of the substrate has become moist and/or moldy.



As your colony grows and eats, the mealworms will start to pupate into what are commonly referred to as "aliens". You can leave the aliens in with the colony OR you can remove them to a small container with no substrate and a paper towel. (Sometimes the mealworms and/or the beetles will eat the aliens, so this is often a good idea).



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When the beetles start emerging, it's time to prepare your second large container. Set this one up just like the first, perhaps with a little less substrate. The beetles don't burrow as much as their larval form, but baby mealworms will need substrate to feed on and hide in. I also throw some paper towels on top of the substrate to give the beetles a place to hide. As with the mealworms, the beetles need fresh fruit and veggies as a source of water.



After a month or two, you may start to notice some very, very tiny worms crawling in the substrate. I usually wait until there seems to be a pretty considerable amount of movement before I take the substrate from the beetle container and add it to the mealworm container. Then I put new substrate in with the beetles and check on it every month or so to see if there is a considerable amount of tiny mealworms again. But once the first batch of mealworms hatches, you can begin harvesting worms for your pets. As long as you leave some mealworms to pupate and produce new beetles, your colony should be fairly stable. And the mealworms seem to grow faster than the beetles die off, so unless you massively over-harvest the mealworms, you should have no problems with sustainability.



Once you have a mature colony developing, you probably want to check on your worms and beetles at least every other day. You should ritually comb through the mealworm tub and remove some of the largest mealworms (ie, the worms intended for consumption) to small tubs that you can then store in the refrigerator. Also check for pupae, and remove any dead worms you find. Remove any vegetable bits that have dried out or become moldy and replace them with fresh vegetables. Finally, try to stir the substrate around regularly. When the substrate gets really sandy, you need to remove as much of it as possible and put new meal in. A colander is ideal for this task. You don't want your mealworms to starve!

Also, check on your pupae container and remove any beetles to the beetle tub right away, especially if you don't keep food in your pupae container. Finally, check the vegetables and substrate in the beetle tub in the same way that you do for the mealworm tub. Also, check the substrate often for signs of movement. Young mealworms are really, really tiny, and you can usually detect their presence by movement, long before you can easily make out any worms.

# Happy Farming!!