African Giant Millipede Care Guide

Archispirostreptus gigas

A healthy giant African millipede needs deep, edible forest-floor substrate, steady warmth and humidity, and undisturbed space to burrow and molt. Vegetables are supplements, not a substitute for decaying leaves and wood.

Species Profile

Common name: African Giant Millipede / Giant African Millipede

Scientific name: *Archispirostreptus gigas*

Adult size: Usually 8-12 in (20-30 cm); large specimens may approach 13 in (33 cm)

Average lifespan: 5-7 years

Native range: Tropical and subtropical East Africa

Habitat and activity: Humid forest-floor and sheltered soil detritivore; primarily terrestrial and burrowing, often most active after dark

Diet: Decaying hardwood leaves and white-rotted hardwood as staples, with small portions of vegetables and occasional fruit

Care difficulty: Beginner to Intermediate; deep substrate and moisture stability are essential

Shopping List

- Secure, well-ventilated terrestrial enclosure with at least a 24 × 18 in (61 × 46 cm) footprint for a single adult; larger is preferred.
- 8-12 in (20-30 cm) or more of pesticide-free, fertilizer-free, edible substrate: organic soil, decomposed hardwood leaves and soft white-rotted wood.
- Cork bark and leaf-litter cover; digital thermometer/hygrometer, mister or watering can, and a shallow, stable water dish.
- Washed supplemental produce; optional cuttlebone or plain calcium carbonate; thermostat-controlled room or side-wall heat if needed.

Housing

A single large adult should have a secure enclosure of at least about 24 × 18 in (61 × 46 cm) of floor area, with enough height for a deep substrate bed and safe airspace. Larger enclosures are strongly preferred, especially for groups. Ventilation should reduce stagnant air without drying the substrate; close escape gaps.

Lighting & UVB

A normal, indirect day/night cycle is sufficient. Dedicated UVB is not an established requirement for this species. Provide dark refuges; keep the enclosure out of direct sun and avoid bright, drying heat lamps.

Heating & Temperature

Aim for roughly 73-80°F (23-27°C) in the daytime, with a cooler retreat and a modest drop to about 70-75°F (21-24°C) at night. Monitor at substrate level. Avoid prolonged temperatures below about 68°F (20°C) or overheating above 85°F (29°C).

If additional heat is needed, warm the room or use thermostatically controlled heat outside a side wall, leaving cooler areas available. Never place a heat mat below the substrate: burrowing animals may be trapped against dangerous heat.

Humidity & Ventilation

Aim for approximately 75-85% relative humidity, but judge actual moisture inside the substrate as well as the hygrometer. The lower layers should remain evenly damp and crumbly, never bone-dry or waterlogged; allow some slightly drier surface patches.

Mist the leaf litter and add clean water carefully at an enclosure edge when deeper soil begins to dry. Provide cross-ventilation. Constant condensation, sour odors, standing water or widespread mold indicate an imbalance; correct moisture and airflow without drying all refuges.

Water & Hydration

Maintain moisture throughout a deep burrowing refuge. Offer a very shallow, stable water dish that cannot trap or drown smaller millipedes; refresh water regularly. Fresh produce adds moisture but does not replace correct substrate hydration.

Use clean, dechlorinated water when possible and keep soaps, cleaners, sprays and pesticide residues away from the habitat. Never excavate an animal simply to check that it is drinking.

Substrate

Substrate is both shelter and staple food. Supply about 8-12 in (20-30 cm) or more for large adults where practical; greater depth supports safe underground molts. Replenish the edible portions before they are exhausted.

Use pesticide- and fertilizer-free organic topsoil or leaf mold mixed generously with decomposed deciduous hardwood leaves and soft white-rotted hardwood. Add a thick leaf-litter layer on top and extra decayed hardwood pieces. Keep the lower mix damp and loose enough for burrowing.

Avoid cedar, pine and other aromatic softwoods; fresh or chemically treated wood; perlite or fertilizer-containing potting mix; sand-dominant substrate; and coco fiber alone. Coco coir may help hold moisture, but it is not nutritious enough to serve as the main substrate.

Food & Feeding

The staple diet is the decomposing hardwood leaf litter and white-rotted hardwood available within the soil every day. Millipedes also feed on the microbial community breaking this material down. Replace edible material gradually as it is consumed.

Offer small portions of rinsed squash, zucchini, sweet potato, carrot, mushroom, cucumber or leafy greens 2-3 times weekly. Apple, banana or melon can be occasional treats. Remove uneaten fresh food before it becomes sour or moldy.

A tiny amount of formulated millipede food, fish flakes or similar protein-rich food can be offered occasionally, not as a staple. Too much protein or fruit encourages pests and spoilage. Avoid seasoned, salted, citrus-heavy or pesticide-exposed foods.

Supplements

Provide a small separate piece of cuttlebone or plain calcium carbonate if desired. Calcium supports the exoskeleton, but exact supplementation requirements have not been established; sound edible substrate remains more important than routine powders. Do not routinely dust food with reptile D3 or multivitamins.

Decor & Enrichment

Use cork bark, leaf litter, soft rotten wood, and low, stable hiding cover. Avoid tall climbing features, sharp edges and heavy loose rocks; a fall or a collapsed decoration can injure a large millipede. Rest heavy items on the enclosure base before adding soil.

Handling & Behavior

Handle only when the animal is on the surface and active. Support the whole body with clean hands close to a soft surface, and let it walk freely. Never pull it from a surface, uncurl it by force, or dig it up for display.

When alarmed, it may coil and release defensive secretions that stain and irritate skin, eyes or mucous membranes. Avoid touching your face and wash hands after contact. Keep handling brief, especially after shipping, during acclimation or near a molt.

Cleaning & Routine Maintenance

Check temperature, ventilation, substrate moisture, surface activity and fresh-food spoilage routinely. Remove spoiled food promptly and replenish decayed leaves and wood as needed. Small harmless mites may be present; identify a problem before treating the enclosure.

Spot-clean rather than routinely replacing the whole substrate. Preserve the established organic layers and never disturb occupied underground molt chambers. If the soil becomes contaminated or sour, replace affected sections carefully and address the cause.

Cohabitation

Compatible same-species adults can often live together if floor space, edible substrate, moisture and hiding cover are ample. Increase space and food with group size; monitor for competition, crowding and reproduction. Do not mix with predatory invertebrates or animals that may injure molting millipedes.

Molting & Seasonal Changes

Millipedes molt below ground and may remain hidden for weeks or longer. Molting individuals are soft and extremely vulnerable. Never dig out an inactive animal or break open a molt chamber; maintain stable deep moisture and temperatures.

Surface activity and appetite can change with recent shipping, darkness, temperature and molt cycles. Investigate chronic weakness, injury, persistent dehydration or foul substrate rather than force-feeding or repeatedly disturbing a hidden animal.

Reproduction

Males have modified legs (gonopods) near the seventh body ring. Mixed-sex adults may breed and lay eggs in deep soil; juveniles are small and develop slowly. Maintain nutritious substrate, secure fine ventilation and minimal disturbance. Do not sift the substrate during suspected egg-laying or molting.

Common Health Concerns

- Dehydration or unsafe heating: curling with persistent weakness, dry soil, or unusual activity warrants immediate checks of deep moisture and temperature.
- Failed molt or physical injury: damaged rings, wounds or limb issues can follow falls, handling or digging; avoid disturbance and seek informed advice.
- Contamination or disease: pesticide exposure, spoiled food, stagnant wet substrate and some infections can cause serious decline. Seek an exotic veterinarian familiar with invertebrates when symptoms persist.

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