

Terrestrial Isopods

Terrestrial isopods, commonly known as pill bugs (*Porcellio*) or sow bugs (*Armadillidium*), are land-dwelling crustaceans. Related to lobsters, crabs, and shrimp, isopods breathe with gills and require a humid environment for survival. They are found in cool, damp places under rocks, rotting wood, and decaying vegetation. The female carries up to 200 eggs in a brood pouch located underneath her body. The young hatch in the pouch and stay there for about 3 weeks. Young resemble their adult counterparts and will molt 4 to 5 times as they grow.

Although similar in size and appearance, pill bugs and sow bugs exhibit different behaviors. When threatened, pill bugs roll into a tight ball for protection while sow bugs run or remain still, appearing to be dead.



Immediate care and handling

When your organisms arrive, open the shipping container to check on their condition. The isopods will arrive wrapped in a damp paper towel. Do not throw away the paper towel! After examining the condition of your isopods, prepare a habitat using a plastic container with a lid.

Habitat setup and maintenance

Punch small air holes in the lid of your chosen container and mist the inside of the container with room-temperature water. Add a 2- to 3-cm layer of potting soil moistened with water that has been treated to remove chemicals. On top of the potting soil, place a 4- to 5-cm layer of leaf litter, compost, or hardwood mulch. Do not use pine bark or mulch that has been treated with chemicals.

Empty the contents of the shipping container, including the paper towel, into the habitat. Gently unfold the paper towel and shake off as many of the isopods as possible. If you are unable to dislodge all of them, leave the paper towel loosely crumpled in the habitat and replace the lid. Leave the habitat in a darkened area for at least an hour. Most of the isopods will move down into the soil. Use a fine-bristled brush to remove any organisms that remain on the paper towel. Mist the inside of the container again and replace the lid.

Place the habitat in an area that receives indirect light and maintains a temperature from 20 to 22° C (68 to 72° F). The soil in the habitat should be kept moistened. Mist daily with room-temperature water to provide the necessary level of humidity. Isopods move away from light. You are most likely to observe them if you keep their habitat in a dimly lit area.

Isopods require minimal care other than a humid environment. If you desire, you can offer your isopods additional food. Appropriate food items include fish food flakes, slightly moistened dog chow, leaf litter, or pieces of raw potato, carrot, or apple. Be sure to remove immediately any material that shows signs of mold.

FAQs

Our isopods disappeared. Where are they?

Isopods will avoid bright light. Check under the soil. Alternately, leave a slice of raw potato or apple on top of the soil overnight. When you lift it, you may find isopods congregating underneath. For the best observation opportunities, be sure to keep the habitat in a dimly lit area.

Our isopods died while we were observing them with magnifiers. What happened?

Terrestrial isopods must be kept moist in order to breathe. Their gills will dry out quickly if they are not exposed to moisture consistently. To observe the isopods with a hand lens, place them in a shallow cup with damp soil or paper towel. When finished, return the isopods to their habitat quickly.

Can other animals be kept with isopods?

Yes, animals with similar habitat requirements (such as millipedes and bess bugs) can be kept with isopods. We do not recommend keeping predators such as centipedes, amphibians, or reptiles with the isopods.

Mold is growing in my isopod habitat. What can I do?

You should increase ventilation in the habitat. Punch more holes in the lid of the container or move your isopods to a container with a vented lid. Be sure to remove any food items or materials that show signs of mold.

Problems?

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

- Orders and replacements: 800.334.5551, then select Customer Service.
- Technical support and questions: caresheets@carolina.com