

How to keep and breed Mealworms

All you need to know about keeping and breeding
mealworms



By

Doug Anderson

Mealworms are the larval form of the darkling beetle.



Picture of mealworms (left) and darkling beetle (right)

They make excellent feeders for reptiles, birds and small mammals. They are also easy to breed. They go from egg to worm to pupae to beetle in roughly 12 weeks.



Different stages of the mealworm life-cycle: mealworm (larvae) centre; pupa right; beetle left

In order to breed mealworms, you will need some form of a container. The size of the container will determine how many mealworms you plan to keep and breed. Containers can be plastic or glass. Make sure that there is sufficient ventilation, whatever container you choose to use.



Plastic breeding drawers, ideal for breeding thousands of mealworms.

The substrate you keep your mealworms in will serve as a food source as well. Wheat bran or whole wheat flour works well and chicken growing mash can be used as well. Moisture can be provided through carrots or potatoes. The bedding must be at least 3cm (1 inch) thick.



Colony of mealworms living in bran.

Mealworms should be kept at a constant temperature in the mid 70's F () for best results but can be kept between 45 – 85F ().



Picture of heating cable which can be used to heat your mealworm colony. Heating pads work equally as well. A thermostat should be used if you want exact temperatures.

As the mealworm grows, it will shed its skin. After a few weeks the worms will pupate into pupae.



Picture of a pupa.

After a few weeks, the pupae develop into beetles.



Picture of the mealworm beetle (darkling beetle)

Beetles only live for a couple of weeks. During this time a female can lay up to 500 eggs. Beetles should be removed and placed into their own breeding container, where they will lay their eggs. The eggs will take a couple weeks to hatch. These new mealworms are the next generation of your breeding project.



Mealworms (larvae)

Once the eggs hatch, the mealworms (larvae) will feed and grow until they pupate and turn into beetles which will lay eggs and the cycle continues.