WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Pet Land Snail

Humid homes, calcium and a hands-clean approach



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CONTENTS

What's Inside

01 Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

02 Meet Your Snail

03 Enclosure Setup & Layout

04 Substrate Guide

05 Humidity, Temperature & Light — The 3 Numbers

06 Diet & Nutrition

07 Shell Health & Calcium

08 Common Challenges & Solutions

09 Handling

10 Routine Care Calendar

11 When to Ask for Help

12 FAQ

13 Every Purchase Gives Back

> ***New owner?*** *Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.*

A pet land snail is one of the gentlest, quietest, most surprisingly charming animals you can bring into a home. There is no barking, no 3 a.m. wheel-running, and no heat lamp. There is a small, patient creature gliding up the side of its enclosure after dark with its eyestalks swaying like tiny periscopes, working through a slice of cucumber with a surprisingly audible little crunch. But "easy" is not the same as "effortless," and a snail is not a houseplant with a shell. Snails need steady moisture, a constant supply of calcium, clean food, careful hands, and a keeper who has checked the law before buying. This guide walks you through all of it: what is legal, what to set up, what to feed, how to read a shell, and when to ask for help. Read the Quick Start first, read the legality section in Meet Your Snail before you buy anything, and then settle in. These animals can live for years, and the slow pace is the whole point.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Confirm the species is legal where you live before you buy anything.** Rules differ by state, and a few states restrict even snails that are common elsewhere. Contact your **state department of agriculture** and **USDA APHIS** to confirm that the species you want is allowed. Never buy, keep, or breed **giant African land snails** (*Lissachatina fulica* and other Achatinidae, including *Achatina* species); they are prohibited in the United States without a USDA permit. Buy **captive-bred** snails only, from a seller who can tell you the species and where the snails were bred.
2. **Set up the enclosure before the snail arrives.** Choose a ventilated container of **5 to 10 gallons** for two or three small snails, with a secure, snail-proof lid. Floor space matters far more than height. Snails are escape artists, and a lid with fine ventilation that closes completely is not optional.
3. **Add 2 to 3 inches of damp substrate.** Use coco fiber or pesticide-free, fertilizer-free organic topsoil. It should feel like a wrung-out sponge: damp throughout, never soupy, with no standing water pooling at the bottom. Add a layer of leaf litter and a piece or two of bark for hides.
4. **Build the two zones.** One end stays moist and shaded with a hide; the other stays slightly drier. Put a very shallow water dish with pebbles in the middle so a snail can always climb out. Place a cuttlebone or a small dish of crushed calcium where it can be reached all day and night.
5. **Check your three numbers with real instruments.** Target **humidity of 70 to 90%** with a drier corner, and **temperature of 65 to 78°F**, with no direct sunlight reaching the enclosure. Use a small digital thermometer and hygrometer, not a guess. Keep the room on a normal day and night cycle with no lamp shining into the tub.
6. **Dechlorinate the water.** Mist and fill the dish with dechlorinated water. Plain tap water can carry chlorine or chloramine, which irritates delicate snail skin. A water conditioner made for aquariums, or bottled spring water, solves this.
7. **Wash your hands, then rinse them very thoroughly.** Soap and cleaner residue harms snails. Before you touch the snail, rinse under plain running water until your hands no longer feel slick and leave them clean and damp. Do not handle snails right after using cleaning products, hand sanitizer, lotion, or perfume.
8. **Let the snail settle in.** Place it in the moist zone, mist lightly, and leave it alone. A new snail may stay sealed up in its shell for a day or two, or head straight for a hide. That is normal. Offer a small piece of fresh vegetable in the evening, since snails are most active after dark.
9. **Offer a first meal and check the calcium.** A thin slice of cucumber or a leaf of romaine on a clean, flat dish is a good first meal. Confirm that the calcium source is available. Remove uneaten fresh food within 24 hours.
10. **Wash your hands with soap and water afterward, and find your help before you need it.** Snails can carry bacteria, so wash up after touching the snail, food, or enclosure. Then look up an exotic animal vet near you and save the number. Most areas have no dedicated "snail vet," and it is far better to know who to call before a problem than during one.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category. No brands, no shopping-list tyranny. Just the categories that matter.

Essentials

- **A ventilated enclosure of 5 to 10 gallons** — a plastic tub, glass tank, or purpose-made terrarium with a close-fitting, secure lid and fine ventilation, wide rather than tall. Ventilation holes or mesh should be small enough that a baby snail cannot squeeze through.
- **A secure lid with fine ventilation** — snails climb, and they can slip through surprisingly small gaps. The lid should latch, be weighted, or fit snugly, and ventilation should sit mostly at the top so air moves without drying the substrate to dust.
- **Substrate** — 2 to 3 inches of coco fiber or pesticide-free, fertilizer-free organic topsoil. Enough to let a snail burrow and to hold moisture for days.
- **Leaf litter and bark hides** — clean, dried, pesticide-free leaves from a source you trust, and pieces of bark or a half-curved hide to create shaded retreats.
- **A digital thermometer and hygrometer** — a small combined unit placed at mid-height, away from the water dish. Without one, you are guessing at the two numbers that matter most.
- **A mister bottle reserved for snail use only** — never used with cleaners, sprays, or anything else, so there is no residue. Fill with dechlorinated water.
- **A dechlorinating water conditioner or a supply of bottled spring water** — for misting and filling the shallow dish.
- **A very shallow water dish with pebbles** — shallow enough that a snail can climb out easily, with pebbles or flat stones to give a footing and prevent accidents.
- **A flat, clean feeding dish** — a ceramic saucer, smooth slate tile, or clean lid keeps fresh food off the substrate so it does not rot into it.
- **A calcium source that is always available** — cuttlebone, crushed oyster shell, or baked, crushed eggshell. Shell is built from calcium, and a snail cannot make it from nothing.
- **A selection of fresh, washed vegetables** — romaine, cucumber, carrot, zucchini, sweet potato, and mushrooms to start.

> ***Ready to set up?*** *Browse the essentials in our collections: Pet Snails.*

Enrichment

- **Cork bark rounds and curved bark pieces** — climbing surfaces, shade, and daytime hiding places that also hold moisture against the substrate.
- **Smooth, clean stones and branches** — safe, sanded driftwood or washed river stones with no sharp edges give climbing variety. Skip anything painted, treated, or collected where pesticides may have been used.
- **Safe live plants** — pothos or other non-toxic houseplants grown without pesticides, in pots outside the enclosure or rooted carefully inside. They add humidity, shade, and something to explore.
- **A deeper corner of substrate** — snails love to burrow, and a slightly deeper area gives them somewhere to dig in, rest, and (if they ever need it) lay eggs.
- **A layered "forest floor"** — a scatter of leaf litter over the substrate creates a more natural surface for night foraging and gives hiding spots at ground level.

- **Cleanup crew, optional** — tiny springtails are harmless to snails and help keep mold in check. They are an extra, not a requirement.
- **A small covered carrier or ventilated tub** — for vet visits or moving the snails temporarily while you deep-clean the enclosure.

> ***Enrichment, one click away.*** *Shop Pet Snails.*

SECTION 2

Meet Your Snail

Land snails are **gastropods** — a word that comes from the Greek for "stomach foot," which is a pretty accurate description of how they get around. A snail glides on a single muscular foot, lubricated with mucus, with a coiled shell on its back that grows as the animal does. The soft body can pull completely inside the shell when threatened, dried out, or cold. At the front are two pairs of tentacles: the long upper pair carries the eyes at the tips, and the shorter lower pair does the smelling and tasting. The eyes sense light and shadow and not much more. The nose does most of the work.

Inside the mouth is the **radula**, a ribbon-like tongue covered in thousands of microscopic teeth, which scrapes and rasps food into manageable pieces. Put your ear near a snail's enclosure at night, and you may actually hear it. Over the soft body sits the **mantle**, the thin layer of tissue that secretes the shell and covers the breathing opening (the pneumostome) on the side of the body. A snail's mantle edge is the part that builds and repairs the shell, which is why healthy mantle tissue and plenty of calcium matter so much.

The legality warning — please read this before you buy

Giant African land snails (*Lissachatina fulica* and other Achatinidae, including *Achatina* species) are prohibited in the United States without a USDA permit. They are destructive agricultural pests that eat hundreds of kinds of plants and damage crops and structures, and they can carry **rat lungworm** (*Angiostrongylus cantonensis*), a parasite that can cause serious illness in people. Please do not buy them, keep them, breed them, or release them, however friendly or beautiful a seller makes them sound. They are sometimes sold online or at shows under the names "giant snails" or "Achatina," and being offered one does not mean it is legal. If you already have one, do not release it; contact your state department of agriculture or USDA APHIS for guidance.

None of that should scare you away from snails in general. It is the reason to be careful about which snail, from whom, and where.

Commonly kept temperate species such as the **common garden snail (*Cornu aspersum*)** and the **Roman or Burgundy snail (*Helix pomatia*)** are widely sold, but rules differ by state, and some states restrict even snails that are common elsewhere. Do not assume any species is allowed everywhere. Check first.

Legal-species checklist — confirm every item before you buy:

- The seller has given you the **exact scientific name**, not just a nickname like "giant snail" or "jumbo snail."
- The species is **not** a giant African land snail or any member of the family Achatinidae.
- You have confirmed with your **state department of agriculture** that this species is legal to keep in your state.
- You have also checked with **USDA APHIS** about the species and any shipping or movement rules.
- The snail is **captive-bred**, and the seller can tell you where.
- You have a plan for the snail's whole life, including what happens if it lays eggs, and you will **never release** a pet snail or its offspring outdoors.
- You have kept the answers in writing. An email from an agency is worth saving.

Never keep wild-collected snails

The snail in your garden is not a free pet. Wild snails can carry **parasites and rat lungworm**, they may have eaten plants treated with **pesticides**, and they are often infected with organisms that do not show until weeks later. Wild snails also carry the risk of spreading disease or species into the wrong place. Keep your garden snails in the garden, and keep captive-bred snails in captivity.

The basics at a glance

Trait	Detail
Common name	Pet land snail (commonly kept temperate species, e.g., common garden snail, Roman or Burgundy snail)
Scientific names	Examples: *Cornu aspersum*, *Helix pomatia* — check legality for your state first
Not legal without a permit	**Giant African land snails (*Lissachatina fulica*, *Achatina* and other Achatinidae)**
Typical size	Shell roughly 1 to 2 inches across, depending on the species
Typical lifespan	**2 to 5+ years** with good care
Activity pattern	**Nocturnal and crepuscular** — most active at night, dusk, and after misting
Social structure	Peaceful; can live in small groups
Reproduction	**Hermaphrodite** — each snail has both male and female reproductive organs
Diet	**Herbivore** — fresh vegetables plus constant calcium
Care level	Low-cost, low-noise, but it requires steady moisture, careful hygiene, and legal diligence

How long do they live?

With good care, commonly kept temperate garden-type snails live roughly **2 to 5 years or more**, and some individuals live longer. Lifespan depends on species, genetics, humidity, diet, calcium, and how often a snail is disturbed. A snail that is kept evenly damp, fed well, and left to sleep through the day is simply a longer-lived snail.

Behavior — slow, nocturnal, and full of small surprises

Snails are **nocturnal**. During the day they tuck into a hide or burrow into the substrate and rest, often sealed in their shell. As evening comes and humidity rises, they emerge, extend their eyestalks, and begin to forage. After a light misting, activity usually picks up within minutes. A snail that is crawling up the glass at 10 p.m. is a healthy, normal snail. One that is sealed up for a whole day with no reaction to misting is a snail to check on.

Eyestalks are the best mood meter you have. Fully extended and swaying means calm and curious. Pulled in partway means startled. Pulled all the way in, with the head retracted, means a snail that feels unsafe, dry, or cold. Snails can regrow a damaged eyestalk, but it is stressful, so never poke at them.

Snails also **burrow**. Do not panic when your snail vanishes into the substrate for a day or two; it is doing what snails do. Gently check the dampness of the substrate and look again after dark.

Aquatic snails are a different animal

Mystery or apple snails, nerite snails, assassin snails, and ramshorn snails are freshwater species kept in aquariums, with entirely different needs: water chemistry, filtration, temperature, tank mates, and algae and food sources. Everything in this guide describes **land snails**. If an aquatic snail is what you have, see our Freshwater Aquarium guide, which covers them properly.

Hermaphrodites, eggs, and thinking ahead

Snails are **hermaphrodites**, which means each animal carries both male and female reproductive organs. Many species still need a partner to exchange genetic material, but some can lay fertile eggs without one. Whichever it is, a healthy adult may dig a small hole in the substrate and lay a clutch of small, round, pearly eggs, sometimes dozens at a time. Plan for this before it happens. **Hatchlings are tiny, many hatch at once, and they must never be released outdoors.** Release spreads pests and disease and is illegal in many places. If you do not want to raise babies, talk to an exotic vet or an experienced keeper about humane options.

Check that any rehoming is legal and goes to a keeper who is prepared for the species.

What surprises new owners

Four things catch most first-time snail keepers off guard. The first is **how much they eat**. A small group can work through a surprising pile of vegetables, and a snail's droppings take on the color of whatever it ate, so orange from carrot or green from romaine is normal. The second is **how much moisture they need**. A snail left slightly dry is not just uncomfortable; it can seal itself up and slip into dormancy. The third is **how easily they escape**. Snails can squeeze through a hole that seems far too small and climb surfaces most animals cannot. The fourth is **how fragile that beautiful shell is**. A shell that looks tough can crack when dropped, squeezed, or pulled, and can thin quietly when calcium is short. Once you understand these four things, the rest is gentle routine.

SECTION 3

Enclosure Setup & Layout

Size, shape, and the escape problem

For two or three small snails, plan on **5 to 10 gallons** of enclosure, and think in floor space rather than height. Snails travel along surfaces. A wide, shallow tub gives them more ground to explore, more room for a moist end and a drier end, and less distance to fall. A tall tank gives them a long climb and a long drop. Snails can fall and crack their shells, so keep climbing furniture low and stable.

Then think about the lid, because the lid is where most snail stories go wrong. A snail can squeeze through a gap you would not believe and can climb clean up a smooth wall and across an upside-down ceiling. Use a **secure lid with fine ventilation**: mesh or small drilled holes at the top, a snug fit with no gaps at the corners, and a latch or weight on top. Check the seam every day for the first week. A snail found wandering the kitchen counter is a snail that has been busy at night, and it needs to go back into the enclosure on a damp hand, not be pulled off a surface.

Ventilation matters as much as the lid. Without airflow, you get stale air, mold, and bacterial slime. With too much airflow, the substrate dries out. Small ventilation holes near the top, with a lid that otherwise seals well, usually strike the balance. If humidity drops too far, cover part of the vent area; if the glass is constantly streaming with condensation and the substrate smells sour, open it up.

The layout — a labeled map you could draw

Picture the enclosure from above and from the front. Here is the layout, zone by zone.

Zone	Where it goes	What goes there	Why it matters
Moist zone	One end of the enclosure (about a third to a half of the floor)	Damp substrate, a pad of damp sphagnum or leaf litter, a bark hide	Keeps the foot moist and gives the snail a place to rest during the day
Dry zone	The opposite end (about a third of the floor)	Slightly drier substrate, a flat stone or bark, the feeding dish	Lets snails choose; reduces mold under food; helps you spot problems
Hide	In or near the moist zone	A curved piece of bark, a cork round, or a half-buried hollow	Daytime shelter that stops stress and drying out
Water dish	Middle of the enclosure, between the zones	A very shallow dish with pebbles so snails can climb out	A drinking and soaking spot with no drowning risk
Feeding dish	In the drier zone	A flat saucer or tile	Keeps food off the substrate so it does not rot into it
Calcium station	Beside the feeding dish	Cuttlebone, crushed oyster shell, or baked eggshell	Always available, day and night
Climbing furniture	Low, stable, mid-enclosure	Bark, smooth stones, a low branch	Exercise and variety; keeps any fall short
Lid	Top of the enclosure	Fine ventilation, secure closure	Air in, snails in

Now put it together from the front. Along the left side, a thick, damp substrate bed, a curved bark hide half-buried at the back, and a scatter of leaf litter. In the center, the shallow water dish ringed with pebbles, sitting in a slight hollow so the rim is not a cliff.

On the right side, a slightly drier slope of substrate, a flat feeding dish, and the calcium station right next to it. Across the top, the lid with its fine ventilation, closed tight. Everything is within crawling distance, nothing is high enough to fall from, and a snail that is too dry can move left while one that is too damp can move right.

Setting it up

Rinse the enclosure with hot water only, never soap or disinfectant. Mix the substrate with dechlorinated water until a squeezed handful holds together but drips only a drop or two, spread it 2 to 3 inches deep with the moist end a little deeper, press hides in so they cannot tip, sink the water dish so its rim sits flush with the substrate, and close the lid. Wait a few hours, read your numbers, and adjust before the snail arrives.

Where to put the enclosure

Pick a spot with **steady room temperature**, away from windows with direct sun, radiators, heating vents, and drafty doors. A closed-in plastic tub in direct sunlight turns into an oven in minutes. A shelf in a quiet room with ordinary room light is ideal. Snails do not need a special lamp.

SECTION 4

Substrate Guide

Substrate is not just flooring for a snail. It is a bedroom, a bathroom, a dining table, a nursery, and a humidity reserve all at once. A good substrate holds moisture, lets a snail burrow, stays clean, and contains nothing that can poison a soft-bodied animal that absorbs substances through its foot.

Substrate	Best for	Performance	Notes
Coco fiber (coco coir), plain	All snails, all ages	Holds moisture well; soft underfoot; easy to burrow in; low odour	Buy plain, additive-free coir. Rinse if it feels salty. Keep damp, not waterlogged
Pesticide-free, fertilizer-free organic topsoil	Adults and juveniles	Natural feel; good for burrowing; supports a healthy microbe balance	Read the bag carefully: no fertilizer, no wetting agents, no added pellets. Mix about half and half with coir for the best texture
Coir and organic topsoil mix	The standard blend	Moisture-holding and burrow-friendly; resists compaction	Keep 2 to 3 inches deep. Stir gently at deep-cleans
Damp sphagnum moss (accent)	The moist zone	Keeps a patch consistently humid; good hide cover	Use as a pad, not as the entire floor. Replace when it sours
Leaf litter and bark (top layer)	Surface cover and hides	Gives shade, hiding places, and natural grazing texture	Use clean, dried, pesticide-free leaves; replace regularly
Paper towel	Quarantine, a sick snail, a temporary tub	Easy to inspect; no particles; trivially replaced	Keep damp; not a long-term home
Cedar or pine shavings	**Avoid outright**	Aromatic oils irritate and can poison	No safe use for snails
Cat litter	**Avoid outright**	Clumping and chemical additives; drying; dusty	Never appropriate
Fertilized potting mix, or soil with additives	**Avoid outright**	Fertilizer pellets, wetting agents, and slow-release chemicals harm snails	Check the ingredient list on every bag
Sand and gravel	**Avoid**	Poor moisture retention; abrasive on the foot; no burrowing	Not suitable as a floor
Wild-collected soil or leaf litter	**Avoid**	Could carry pesticides, parasites, and unwanted hitchhikers	Buy clean material from a trusted source

The avoid-outright list

These never go in a snail enclosure, at any age, in any amount:

- **Cedar and pine** shavings, bark, or chips of any kind
- **Cat litter** of any type
- **Any soil or mix with fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide, or wetting agent**
- **Anything treated with chemicals**, including treated wood, painted decor, and dyed substrate
- **Copper**, including copper wire, copper-containing pest products, and copper-bearing decor; copper repels and harms snails
- **Salt**, including salted sand, salty soil, or water softener residue

- **Wild-collected soil, leaf litter, wood, or plants** from areas you cannot guarantee were never sprayed
- **Soap, detergent, or disinfectant residue** on any surface or accessory

Keeping substrate healthy

Spot-clean daily: remove droppings, old food, and any dead leaf matter that looks slimy. Every week, stir the top layer gently and check dampness. Every month, replace the top inch or two and refresh the leaf litter. Every few months, replace the whole substrate. If you smell sourness or rot, replace the affected area at once. Sour substrate means poor ventilation, too much food, or too much water.

SECTION 5

Humidity, Temperature & Light — The 3 Numbers

Snails are made of soft, moist tissue wrapped in a thin skin, and they lose water constantly through the foot. That is why humidity is the number that matters most. Warmth is the second, because it controls how active they are and how fast they dry out. Light is the third, and it is mostly a question of what to avoid. Get these three right and the rest of snail keeping falls into place.

Parameter	Target value	How to measure it	What goes wrong when it's off
Humidity	**70 to 90%** in the moist zone, with a drier area; substrate damp but not waterlogged	Digital hygrometer at mid-height; the squeeze test on the substrate	Too low: dehydration, sealed-up snails, shell damage, slime that dries out; too high with no airflow: mold, bacteria, stagnant air, sour smell
Temperature	About **65 to 78°F**	Digital thermometer at mid-height, checked day and night	Too cool: snails seal up and become inactive, appetite drops; too warm: dehydration, stress, overheating, and death in a hot spell
Light	Ordinary room light on a day and night cycle; **no direct sunlight**	Observe the enclosure at different times of day; keep it away from windows	Direct sun: rapid overheating inside a small tub; constant bright light: stress and poor rest; no UVB needed
Substrate moisture	Damp throughout; a clump holds together but releases only a drop or two when squeezed	The squeeze test, weekly	Bone dry: dormancy and dehydration; soggy: anaerobic substrate, bacteria, and sour smells
Airflow	Gentle ventilation at the lid; no stale smell	Smell test; watch for condensation patterns	Stagnant air: mold and bacterial growth; too much airflow: fast drying

Humidity — the number you will think about most

Aim for **70 to 90%** in the moist zone, and make sure there is a **drier area** so a snail can choose. Mist with **dechlorinated water** once or twice a day, enough to leave fine droplets on the walls and substrate surface but not a pond at the bottom. Do not spray the snail directly with a hard jet. A snail that is damp, gliding, and extending its eyestalks is in the right range.

If the hygrometer reads low, mist more often, add damp moss in one corner, or reduce ventilation slightly. If it reads high and the glass is streaming and the substrate smells sour, increase airflow, thin the damp layer, and clear away old food. Always keep that drier zone, since a snail trapped in a permanently saturated enclosure can develop shell and skin problems.

Temperature — room temperature is usually enough

Most commonly kept temperate species do well at about **65 to 78°F**, which is where most living rooms and bedrooms sit anyway. That means **no heater is needed in most homes.** Avoid heat mats under the tub and avoid lamps. They dry out the substrate and can overheat a small enclosure quickly. If your room regularly drops well below the range, move the enclosure to a warmer room instead of adding heat. If your room gets above the range in summer, move it to the coolest room, away from windows, and consider mist and ventilation to help. A hot car, a sunny windowsill, and a room with no cooling in a heatwave are the usual causes of overheating, and overheating can kill snails faster than almost anything else.

Cooler seasonal temperatures can slow snails down and send them into dormancy. That is natural, but a pet snail does not need to be pushed into it. Keep conditions steady and let them be active.

Light — keep it simple

Snails do not need UVB, heat lamps, or special lighting. They do best with a **normal day and night cycle**: room light in daytime, darkness at night, about 10 to 12 hours of each. Keep the enclosure out of direct sun. If you want to look at your snails after dark, use a dim light briefly. They will be out and about, and that is when they are most fun to watch.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Fresh vegetables rotated through the week, with calcium always available. Remove uneaten fresh food within a day.

Pet land snails are **herbivores**, and they are enthusiastic ones. In the evening, a hungry snail will head straight for fresh vegetables and spend an hour or two rasping away with its radula. The key to a healthy snail diet is **variety, freshness, and calcium**. Rotate a few vegetables across the week, keep everything clean, and always leave a calcium source in the enclosure.

Wash all produce thoroughly. Organic is best, and homegrown produce from a garden you know was never sprayed is better still. That is the Walnut Creek way: **no mystery ingredients**. Anything that has been sprayed with pesticide can poison a snail, and a snail absorbs what it touches as well as what it eats.

Safe foods

Food	Category	Frequency	Notes
Romaine lettuce	**Staple leafy green**	Several times per week	Reliable favorite; washed, torn into pieces
Cucumber	**Staple vegetable**	Several times per week	Hydrating; thin slices with the peel washed well; snails love it

Food	Category	Frequency	Notes
Carrot	**Staple vegetable**	Several times per week	Grated or in thin slices; adds color and vitamin A
Zucchini	**Staple vegetable**	Several times per week	Thin slices or shreds; mild and well accepted
Sweet potato	**Staple vegetable**	Once or twice per week	Raw and finely grated, or lightly steamed and cooled; no butter or seasoning
Mushrooms (plain, store-bought)	**Occasional treat**	Once a week	Washed and sliced thin; never wild-collected mushrooms
Kale	**Use in moderation**	Once a week at most	Fine as part of a mix, not a daily staple
Bell pepper	**Occasional**	Once a week	Thin slices; most snails nibble it
Peas and green beans	**Occasional**	Once a week	Lightly steamed and cooled, chopped small
Squash and pumpkin	**Occasional**	Once a week	Thin slices or shreds; offer a little at a time

Foods to avoid

Food	Category	Frequency	Notes
Salty foods and salted vegetables	**Never**	Never	Salt dehydrates and can kill snails; even small amounts are harmful
Citrus fruits and juice	**Never**	Never	Acidic; irritates the skin and can harm the shell
Onion, garlic, leek	**Never**	Never	Harmful to snails and best kept out of the enclosure
Processed human food (bread, pasta, crackers, cooked meals)	**Never**	Never	Preservatives and additives; poor nutrition; spoils fast
Sugary foods and sweets	**Never**	Never	No nutritional value; spoils quickly; encourages mold
Anything with preservatives	**Never**	Never	Unsafe for a small, absorbent animal
Anything sprayed with pesticide	**Never**	Never	A leading cause of sudden snail death; wash all produce and buy organic where possible
Copper-containing products	**Never**	Never	Copper is toxic to snails; avoid copper-based sprays and fertilizers near food and enclosure
Spinach and beet greens	**Limit**	Rarely	Oxalates can bind calcium; choose romaine instead
Iceberg lettuce	**Avoid as a staple**	Rarely	Mostly water with little nutrition
Sweet fruit	**Limit strictly**	A tiny nibble now and then, or skip	Sugary; mold and attract pests; not needed

Food	Category	Frequency	Notes
Wild plants and weeds	**Avoid**	Never	Unknown pesticide exposure and possible rat lungworm contamination

Calcium — the one thing that is always there

Calcium is the building block of the shell. A snail with no calcium cannot grow or repair its shell, and the shell quietly thins, pits, and cracks. Provide calcium **at all times**, not just at mealtimes.

Calcium source	How to offer it	Notes
Cuttlebone	Rest a piece on the substrate, rough side up	Snails rasp it as needed; replace when worn down
Crushed oyster shell	A small dish, or sprinkled over food	Plain, additive-free; crushed to small flakes
Baked, crushed eggshell	Rinse, bake until dry and brittle, crush finely	Baking sanitizes it; never use raw shell, which can carry bacteria

Some snails prefer one source and ignore the others, so offer two. Watch which one is nibbled. A snail that is rasping at its calcium regularly is telling you something about its needs.

The feeding schedule

Snails are **nocturnal**, so feed in the **evening**, shortly before lights go down. Offer a small pile of fresh vegetables on the clean, flat feeding dish. Start with a portion about the size of the snails themselves per animal, and adjust over a few days: if everything is gone by morning, offer a little more, and if a lot is left over, offer less. **Remove uneaten fresh food within 24 hours**, because it rots, grows mold, and draws pests.

When	What
Every evening	Fresh vegetables on the clean dish, washed and chopped small
All the time	Calcium source available; shallow water dish topped up
Each morning	Remove uneaten food, droppings, and anything slimy
Weekly	Rotate vegetables so no single food is the whole diet

Water

Keep a **very shallow dish** with pebbles so snails can drink and soak but always climb out. Refresh it daily with dechlorinated water, and rinse it with plain water. Mist for droplets on the walls and leaves, since snails will lap those up too.

SECTION 7

Shell Health & Calcium

A snail's shell is not a removable house. It is part of the animal, grown by the mantle from the inside out, and it records the snail's life like tree rings. Reading it is the single best way to judge how your care is going.

Feature	Healthy shell	Unhealthy shell
Surface	Smooth, glossy, with clear growth lines and clean color banding	Chalky, dull, rough, flaking, or pitted with small holes
Thickness	Firm and solid; resists a very light touch	Thin, translucent, or soft; flexes or crumbles easily
Growing edge (lip)	Smooth, slightly flared, with fresh thin growth	Ragged, brittle, or stopped growing for a long time
Cracks	None	Hairline cracks, chips, or broken pieces
Color	Even, natural markings for the species	Pale, bleached, or eroded patches near the tip

What a poor shell is telling you

Pitting, thinning, chalkiness, or cracks usually point to one of three problems: **low calcium**, **low humidity**, or **acidic conditions**. Acidic substrate, acidic foods like citrus, and constant wetness with poor airflow all eat into shell. Dry air makes the snail seal up and stops it growing at all. Start with the basics: confirm the calcium source is there and being used, check humidity with your hygrometer, remove acidic foods, and refresh any sour substrate.

Repairs

Snails repair their own shells. The mantle lays down new shell from the inside, and small chips and hairline cracks usually mend over weeks when calcium and humidity are right. Here is how to help:

- **Keep calcium available at all times**, and offer two sources.
- **Hold humidity steady** in the 70 to 90% range.
- **Handle as little as possible** while the shell heals.
- **Do not glue, tape, or paint a shell.** Adhesives and coatings can poison or trap a snail, and the body is attached to the inside.
- **Keep the enclosure free of sharp edges**, and keep climbing low.

A tiny chip at the lip, a pale old scar, or a patch repaired with slightly different coloring is common and fine. A large break with exposed body, a hole in the shell with fluid leaking, or a shell that keeps crumbling needs an exotic vet or a call to us the same day. Stress and shock are real in a damaged snail.

Epiphragm and aestivation

When a snail faces dry or cold conditions, it can retreat into its shell and seal the opening with a thin, papery film of dried mucus called an **epiphragm**. This is the sign of **aestivation**, a dormant, energy-saving rest that snails use to survive drought and heat (the same sealing can happen in cold, which is called hibernation). In a pet snail, an epiphragm almost always means one thing: **it is too dry or too cold in the enclosure.**

Do not panic and do not pull. An aestivating snail is alive, just paused. To wake it:

1. Check your numbers. Is humidity below 70%? Is the room cold?

2. Mist the enclosure and raise humidity.
3. Offer a shallow, lukewarm bath: a clean dish with about a quarter inch of dechlorinated water, for 10 to 15 minutes, with the snail sitting on a damp surface so it can come up for air.
4. Return it to the moist zone and watch. The epiphragm will soften, and within hours to a day the snail should emerge.

A snail that has been sealed for days and does not respond may be dead. See the FAQ on how to tell. Prevention is simple: keep it damp, keep it steady, and do not let the room dry out.

SECTION 8

Common Challenges & Solutions

Dehydration

What you see: a snail sealed in its shell with a papery film across the opening; a dry, wrinkled, or sticky foot; no trail; a shell that feels light; substrate that is dusty to the touch. **Why:** humidity too low, substrate too dry, no drinking dish, too much ventilation, or a heat source drying the tub. **What to do:** mist the enclosure, dampen the substrate, offer a lukewarm shallow bath, and move the snail to the moist zone. Recheck the hygrometer and reduce ventilation slightly. **When to ask for help:** a snail that does not respond within a day, or one that looks shrunken inside the shell.

Shell damage

What you see: a chip, crack, or hole in the shell; a broken lip; exposed body tissue; clear or pale fluid at a break. **Why:** a fall from a high surface, a squeeze during handling, a drop, or a shell weakened by low calcium. **What to do:** move the snail to a quiet, damp, low enclosure with calcium and no climbing furniture. Keep humidity high and handling to a minimum. Do not glue or tape. **When to ask for help:** any break with exposed body or leaking fluid, or a crack that grows. Call an exotic vet or us the same day.

Mites

What you see: tiny, pale or reddish specks moving on the snail's body, around the breathing hole, or on the shell and glass; a snail that is restless or reluctant to come out. **Why:** snail mites hitch a ride on new animals or arrive on unwashed produce, decor, or wild-collected material. They thrive in damp, dirty conditions. **What to do:** remove uneaten food, replace the substrate and leaf litter, wash the snail gently with a soft damp touch, and clean the enclosure with hot water only. Do not use chemical mite treatments. **When to ask for help:** if mites keep returning, or the snail looks thin or sealed up. An exotic vet can advise on safe options.

Mold

What you see: white, gray, or green fuzzy patches on food, leaf litter, or the substrate; a sour or musty smell. **Why:** uneaten food left too long, poor ventilation, or too much water. **What to do:** remove the mold, the food, and any affected substrate immediately; increase airflow; reduce misting slightly; and refresh the feeding dish. A small spot of mold on old food is a housekeeping flag; a widespread problem means the whole tub needs a reset. **When to ask for help:** if the snail itself has fuzzy patches, or several animals stop eating.

Bacterial or fungal infection

What you see: discolored slime, foul smell, sores or pale patches on the foot or body, slimy froth around the breathing hole, a limp snail that will not retract. **Why:** dirty, stagnant, or waterlogged conditions; injuries that become infected; or stress. **What to do:** move the snail to a clean quarantine tub with damp paper towel, fresh air, and good hygiene; clean the main enclosure with hot water; and correct moisture and airflow. Do not use human medicines or antiseptics. **When to ask for help:** straight away. Infections can move quickly in small animals. Contact an exotic vet or us.

Calcium deficiency

What you see: a chalky, thin, pitted, or cracked shell; slow or stopped shell growth; a soft lip; snails rarely seen near the calcium source. **Why:** no calcium available, a source the snail does not like, a diet heavy in oxalate foods, or acidic conditions. **What to do:** offer two calcium sources at all times, rotate vegetables, remove acidic foods, and refresh sour substrate. **When to ask for help:** if the shell keeps thinning after a month of corrected care, or there is soft damage.

Chemical exposure

What you see: sudden limpness, excessive frothy slime, a snail that hangs out of the shell and will not retract, twitching or curling, or several snails sick at once. **Why:** pesticide on produce, soap or cleaner residue, perfume, lotion, hand sanitizer, aerosol sprays in the room, copper products, or fertilizer in the soil. **What to do:** move the snail to a clean tub with damp, unscented paper towel, rinse it very gently with dechlorinated water, and remove the source. Ventilate the room. **When to ask for help:** immediately. Exposure can be fatal within hours. Call an exotic vet.

Escapes

What you see: a snail missing from the enclosure; silvery trails on the lid, shelf, or floor; a lid pushed ajar. **Why:** a lid that does not seal, a gap at the seam, or ventilation holes that are too large. **What to do:** search at night, since snails move after dark; check damp, dark places and behind appliances. When you find one, let it crawl onto a damp, clean hand and return it. Fix the closure. A dried-out escapee needs a lukewarm bath. **When to ask for help:** if a missing snail is found dried out and unresponsive, or if you suspect it reached a place with chemicals.

Accidental crushing

What you see: a crack or break after handling, a dropped snail, a snail caught under a lid or furniture, or a shell squeezed in a child's hand. **Why:** snails are soft and shells are thin; small hands and quick movements are the main risk. **What to do:** follow the shell damage steps; keep handling gentle; use low, soft surfaces for sessions; and always check lids and furniture before closing. **When to ask for help:** any crush injury with exposed body or fluid, the same day.

Overheating

What you see: a snail sealed up and still in a warm room; a dry or limp foot; heavy slime; a snail that crawls frantically toward the top of the tub; the tub warm to the touch. **Why:** direct sun on the enclosure, a heater, a hot car, or a room with no cooling in a heatwave. **What to do:** move the enclosure at once to a cool, shaded room; mist with cool dechlorinated water; offer a lukewarm shallow bath; and increase ventilation. **When to ask for help:** if the snail does not respond within hours. Heat can kill quickly.

Quick reference

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Urgency
Sealed up, papery film at opening	Dehydration or cold dormancy	Mist, raise humidity, lukewarm bath	Same day if no response
Chip or crack in shell	Fall, squeeze, or low calcium	Quiet, damp, low tub; calcium; no glue	Same day if body exposed
Tiny moving specks	Snail mites	Replace substrate; hot-water clean	Within days; sooner if snail is thin
Fuzzy patches, sour smell	Mold and poor airflow	Remove food and substrate; add ventilation	Within days if spreading
Foul slime, sores, limp body	Bacterial or fungal infection	Quarantine; clean; correct conditions	Same day
Chalky, pitted, thin shell	Calcium deficiency or acidity	Two calcium sources; rotate foods	Within a week if worsening
Frothy slime, twitching, sudden limpness	Chemical exposure	Clean tub; remove source; ventilate	Immediate
Missing snail, trails	Escape	Search at night; fix lid	Same day if dry or unresponsive

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Urgency
Heat-stressed, sealed up in warm room	Overheating	Cool shaded room; lukewarm bath	Immediate

SECTION 9

Handling

Snails are best treated as animals to watch rather than to carry around. Many are happiest in the enclosure, and every time you pick one up, you are asking a soft-bodied animal with a thin shell to trust you. But a gentle session now and then is part of the joy, and these are the family rules.

The family handling rules

- **Use clean, damp, residue-free hands.** Rinse under plain running water until your hands no longer feel slick, and leave them damp. Soap, hand sanitizer, lotion, and perfume harm snails.
- **Let the snail come to you.** Rest a damp hand flat in front of it and let it crawl on. Never scoop or flick it off a surface.
- **Support the whole foot.** Keep your palm flat and level. The foot should rest on your hand the whole time, with the shell upright and unsqueezed.
- **Never pull a snail off a surface.** A snail holds on tightly with its foot, and pulling can tear the foot or crack the shell. Dab a few drops of dechlorinated water near the foot, wait, and let it release.
- **Keep sessions short.** Five to ten minutes, in the evening when snails are naturally awake.
- **Work low and over something soft.** Sit on the floor or at a table with a towel under you.
- **Never handle a sealed-up or injured snail.**
- **Wash your hands with soap and water afterward**, every time. Snails can carry bacteria.

The cleaning-products rule

Do not handle a snail right after using **cleaning products, hand sanitizer, lotion, or perfume.** A snail absorbs what touches its foot, and even faint residue can cause illness. Wash well and rinse thoroughly. Wait until your hands feel clean and plain, and then go to the snail. The same rule applies to the room. Keep aerosol sprays, plug-in fresheners, and scented candles away from the enclosure.

Children and families

Snails and children can be a lovely match when everyone follows the rules. Children should handle snails only while sitting on the floor or a soft surface, with an adult beside them and hands rinsed clean and damp. Teach the "open hand, flat palm" posture: no squeezing, no carrying while walking, no handling near the face or mouth. Everyone washes with soap and water afterward. Children under five or anyone with a weakened immune system should watch rather than hold, since snails can carry bacteria. Young kids often love just being allowed to feed the snail a slice of cucumber.

Reading a snail's mood

Signal	What it means
Eyestalks fully extended and swaying	Calm and curious
Eyestalks partly retracted	Startled or checking something
Head and body pulled in	Stress, dryness, or cold
Tentacles curling or flinching	Contact with something unpleasant: residue, salt, acid
Rapid climbing to the lid	Possible overheating, dryness, or an escape attempt

Signal	What it means
Foam or froth at the breathing hole	Irritation; possible chemical exposure

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Mist with dechlorinated water; check the hygrometer and thermometer
Daily	Remove uneaten fresh food, droppings, and anything slimy
Daily	Offer fresh vegetables in the evening on a clean dish
Daily	Refresh the shallow water dish; confirm the calcium source is available
Daily	Check the lid closure and look for escapes
Daily	Look over each snail for eyestalk movement, a clean foot, and an intact shell
Weekly	Stir the top of the substrate gently; do the squeeze test for moisture
Weekly	Rinse the water dish and feeding dish with hot water only
Weekly	Rotate vegetables; replace worn cuttlebone or top up crushed shell
Weekly	Inspect shells for pitting, chips, or chalkiness
Monthly	Replace the top inch or two of substrate and refresh leaf litter
Monthly	Wipe the inside walls and lid with plain hot water; check for mold
Monthly	Check ventilation openings and the lid seal
Every few months	Replace the full substrate and deep-clean the enclosure with hot water only
Annually	Review your setup against this guide; check state rules again; locate your exotic vet

SECTION 11

When to Ask for Help

Snails hide trouble well, and because they are small, problems can move fast. **When you're uncertain, ask.** There is no dedicated snail vet in most areas, so look for an exotic animal vet who treats invertebrates, or call us at (717) 983-8069 and we will talk it through.

Act today:

- A snail hanging limply out of its shell that will not retract when touched
- Frothy or foamy slime, twitching, or curling after possible chemical exposure
- A shell break with exposed body tissue or leaking fluid
- A snail in a heat-stressed state after a hot spell
- A sealed snail that does not respond to misting and a lukewarm bath within a day
- A sour, rotten smell from a snail's body
- Several snails sick at once
- A lost snail found dried out and still

Book within a few days:

- A chalky, pitted, or thinning shell that does not improve after corrected care
- Visible mites that keep returning
- Pale sores, discolored patches, or slime that smells off
- Refusal to eat for more than several nights alongside withdrawn behavior
- A snail that stops growing or looks smaller
- Any clutch of eggs, if you are unsure of your plan for the hatchlings

Bring or send photos, your temperature and humidity readings, the foods you have offered, and the products used near the enclosure.

SECTION 12

FAQ

What do pet snails eat?

Pet land snails are herbivores, and they do best on a rotation of fresh, washed vegetables such as romaine lettuce, cucumber, carrot, zucchini, sweet potato, and plain mushrooms, with kale in moderation. Offer a small portion in the evening, when snails are most active, and remove any uneaten fresh food within 24 hours. Always keep a calcium source in the enclosure, such as cuttlebone, crushed oyster shell, or baked, crushed eggshell. Avoid salty foods, citrus, onion, garlic, processed human food, sugary foods, anything with preservatives, copper-containing products, and anything sprayed with pesticide.

How long do pet snails live?

With good care, commonly kept temperate garden-type snails live roughly 2 to 5 years, and some live longer. Steady humidity, a clean enclosure, constant calcium, fresh food, gentle handling, and a stable room temperature help most. Lifespan varies by species, so ask the breeder about the species you are buying.

Are pet snails legal to own?

It depends on the species and your state. Giant African land snails, including Lissachatina fulica and other Achatinidae such as Achatina species, are prohibited in the United States without a USDA permit because they are destructive agricultural pests that can carry rat lungworm, so please do not buy, keep, breed, or release them. Commonly kept temperate species such as the common garden snail (Cornu aspersum) and Roman or Burgundy snail (Helix pomatia) are widely sold, but rules differ by state, so check with your state department of agriculture and USDA APHIS before you buy, and buy captive-bred snails only.

How big a tank do pet snails need?

A ventilated container of about 5 to 10 gallons works well for two or three small snails. Floor space matters more than height, so choose a wide enclosure over a tall one, with 2 to 3 inches of damp substrate. The lid must be secure with fine ventilation, since snails are escape artists. Add more space if you keep more snails, and plan for room to build a moist zone and a drier zone.

How humid should a snail enclosure be?

Aim for roughly 70 to 90% humidity in the moist zone, with a drier area so snails can choose. Measure with a digital hygrometer, and mist with dechlorinated water once or twice a day. The substrate should be damp but not waterlogged. Ventilation is important too, because stagnant, wet air breeds mold and bacteria. If a snail seals itself up behind a papery film, humidity is the first thing to check.

Why is my snail's shell cracked or pitted?

Cracks, pitting, thinning, and chalkiness usually mean low calcium, low humidity, or acidic conditions, though a fall or squeeze can also crack a shell. Check that cuttlebone, crushed oyster shell, or baked eggshell is always available, confirm humidity with a hygrometer, and remove acidic foods and sour substrate. Small chips often repair themselves over weeks. Never glue or tape a shell. A break with exposed body or leaking fluid needs an exotic vet or a call to us the same day.

Can I hold a pet snail?

Yes, gently and occasionally. Rinse your hands very thoroughly with plain water so no soap, sanitizer, lotion, or perfume residue remains, and keep them clean and damp. Let the snail crawl onto your flat palm, support the whole foot, and never pull a snail off a surface. Keep sessions short, and wash with soap and water afterward, since snails can carry bacteria. Children should be seated and supervised.

Do pet snails need calcium?

Yes, absolutely. Calcium is what a snail builds and repairs its shell from, and a snail without it develops a thin, pitted, chalky, or cracked shell. Keep a source available at all times, whether cuttlebone, crushed oyster shell, or baked, crushed eggshell, and offer two options so the snail can choose. Watch to see which one is being nibbled.

Can I keep a snail I found outside?

Please don't. Wild-collected snails can carry parasites and rat lungworm, may have been exposed to pesticides, and can bring mites or disease into your home. They may also be a species that is restricted where you live. Enjoy wild snails in the garden, and if you want a pet snail, buy a captive-bred one of a species you have confirmed is legal for your state. Never release a pet snail outdoors, either.

How can I tell if my snail is dead?

Check three things. First, smell: a dead snail has an unmistakable foul, rotten odour, and if there is no smell, it is likely alive. Second, look: a snail hanging limply out of its shell, or one whose body is shrunken and dark and does not react to a gentle touch of the tentacles or foot, is a bad sign. Third, give it a lukewarm shallow bath of dechlorinated water for 10 to 15 minutes, since a snail sealed by dryness or cold will often wake. If there is no response after a day of correct humidity and warmth, or there is a foul smell, the snail has probably died. When in doubt, ask.

> ***Ready to shop?*** *Start with Pet Snails. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.*

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not as an option at checkout, and not as a promotion. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible pet ownership and community care are the same commitment made in two directions.

For snail keepers, that commitment looks a little different. Snails are small, quiet, and easy to overlook, which is exactly why they deserve a keeper who has done the homework: the legal species, the captive-bred source, the damp substrate, the calcium, and the clean, residue-free hands. If you have read this guide, you have done that homework, and these animals are lucky to have you.

We're a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, tend our own animals, and stock the clean-label goods we would put in front of our own pets: **no mystery ingredients**, **Clean Fuel, No Junk**, and no snail ever leaves our care guides without an honest picture of what it needs. No soap, no stress. If you have a question about your snail's humidity, its shell, its calcium, or whether a species is right for your state, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We would rather talk it through with you.

Welcome to years of slow, quiet, small-scale wonder.

From our family to yours, **Walnut Creek Supply** — Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania *walnutcreeksupply.com*