

J.J. Cardinal's Info

Special Edition

Beneficial Insects

Praying Mantis are good for the garden

Praying Mantis (*tenodera aridifolia sinensis*) are beautiful insects that have a voracious appetite. They help to control insect pests the organic way. They are strictly carnivorous and feed on almost any insect.

In the fall the females produce egg cases. She deposits the eggs in a frothy secretion that hardens to protect the eggs from predators and severe weather climates. The egg cases are attached to twigs, leaves, fences, etc., and may contain 50 to 400 eggs with an average of about 200. The egg cases are harvested and carefully checked to ensure that only quality cases are selected for our customers.

RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS

Attach the egg cases to a twig or plant one to two feet off the ground where there is cover to protect the babies. When hatching, the young crawl from between tiny flaps in the cases and hang from silken threads about two inches below the case. After drying out, the long-legged young disperse into the vegetation leaving little, if any, evidence of their appearance. This happens within an hour or two and it is very difficult to know hatching has occurred unless the elusive, well-camouflaged young are found. The egg case does not change in appearance in any way.

For a fun kid's project or if you want to know approximately when the mantises have

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To see the benefits praying mantis have to offer: three mantis egg pods are recommended for a small garden; six egg pods are recommended for 1/2 acre, and 9

hatched, place the egg cases in a paper bag and paper clip, or for a more permanent observation chamber we offer a nylon net bug cage for \$12.95. Place the bag on a window sill in the direct sunlight. Periodically open the bag carefully and, if already hatched, take outside and release. Be patient—sometimes it takes up to eight weeks of warm weather for them to hatch.

The praying mantis (also known as soothsayers or rear-horses) are familiar to most people.

Praying mantis are highly beneficial as predators of noxious insects and appear to be fearless. When approached they rear up on their back pair of legs and partially raise their wings in a threatening manner (no doubt this behavior led to the common name "rear-horses"). They cannot hurt us in any way and should not be feared.

Mantis behavior is bizarre, at least from a human standpoint—so, enjoy seeing them this summer in your garden.

For more information on rearing mantis see reverse side.

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Keeping Praying Mantises

Pet Bugs

(The following information was taken from Pet Bugs: A Kid's Guide to Catching & Keeping Touchable Insects, available at J.J. Cardinal's Wild Bird & Nature Store. \$12.95, paperback, 117 pages, line drawings.)

What They Look Like

To recognize a mantis, look first for the two front legs held in front as if in prayer. These front legs are lined with spines to keep their victims, or prey, from slipping away. The back legs are long and very thin.

Mantis bodies are long and green or brown. Their straight wings look like leaves and their long legs look like twigs, so they blend in very well with plants. A full grown mantis is 3 to 4 inches long, and has a triangular face with two big eyes and a little pointed mouth.

How to Keep Them

A mantis needs a terrarium, an enclosure for keeping and observing animals or plants indoors. A terrarium is usually made of clear plastic. It can be as small as 8 X 5 inches but larger is better—up to 10 X 20 inches or so. A lid is essential. A fiberglass window screen mesh lid is ideal because you can see through it and air flows through readily. We have an ideal container for housing mantis for only \$12.95 if you need one.

Keep the floor of the terrarium bare—no sand, no soil, no leaves, so the mantis's prey has nowhere to hide. Some predators will turn things over looking for prey, but mantises will not. The food has to be out in the

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open. All you need to put in the cage is a sturdy branched twig that will not rock. The mantis needs the twig to climb on.

Water the mantis by offering water in a spoon every day. It's fun to watch a mantis drink from a spoon. You will feel like you have tamed a wild beast. Touch the water to her mouth if she does not notice it at first, or you can water a mantis by spraying droplets in the cage daily with a mister.

If your mantis is a female, and fertilized she may lay eggs on the twig in late summer or autumn. The eggs come out of the end of her body inside a mass of foam. The foam dries and hardens into a case. If you want to keep the egg case, put the egg case in a sealed jar in the refrigerator, or else the eggs may hatch in mid winter when it's too cold to let them go outside. Put the egg case outdoors attached to a stem three to four feet off the ground in mid April.

All adult mantises die in autumn or early winter no matter how well you care for them. Like the spider in Charlotte's Web, they leave their eggs to carry on.

What to Feed Them

Praying Mantis eat just about any insect smaller than themselves, but they especially like crickets. You can purchase tiny crickets and fruit flies at pet supply centers. Mantis love both of these. They will also eat raw hamburger and sliced hot dogs. Feed and water your mantis every day.