

# An Introduction to Mealworms

A mealworm is the larval stage of the darkling beetle. Although it looks like a worm, it actually has six small legs on the upper portion of the body. Mealworms (and darkling beetles) are said to be more active at night; however, they can also be active during the day.

Darkling beetle eggs are tiny, and about 2mm long by .9mm wide. The mealworms are dark beige with brownish bands; they have a segmented body, six legs, and two antennae. The pupa is a white/cream color with a large head and pointed tail (the color darkens as it grows). The beetle has a hard exoskeleton, six legs, two antennae, and a body divided into three parts (head, thorax, abdomen).

Adults and larvae are considered pests because of their diet; they tend to eat grains, and some seedlings. They also eat decaying material, like decomposing animals and dead plants. They get all the water they need from the food they eat. Mealworms have many predators; they are eaten by many animals, including birds, rodents, spiders, and some other beetles. They usually like to live in cool, dark, moist places (like under rocks or logs).

## How to Take Care of Mealworms

There are four steps to consider when taking care of your mealworms:

1. Build a house for them. This could be made out of plastic, metal, glass, or cardboard. Make sure they cannot climb out and use oats as a colony.
2. Feed them with bran but also have small pieces of apples, carrots, bananas, and potatoes. Make sure there is something in there home that will provide them with moisture, but you can't put a container of water in, as they will drown.

3. Handle your worms carefully: Do not crush or drop them into their home. They are very clean and don't bite, so don't be afraid to pick them up.

4. When you go to find them, don't panic right away. They dig in the oats, so be careful when fishing around to find them.

**Important things to remember:**

- Also remember that they are living things and should be treated and handled with respect.
- The head of a mealworm is darker on the underside.
- Mealworms prefer warm and dark places.
- Remove any dead ones, and remove their waste by placing them in a strainer, as it will allow the waste to fall out.