What is a mealworm?

A mealworm is not really a worm at all. It’s an insect. Actually, it’s a darkling beetle that hasn’t grown up yet.

Darkling beetles have four stages of life. They begin their life as an egg. When they hatch, they spend several months as a larva called a mealworm. Next they’ll turn into a pupa, which is a stage where they cannot crawl or eat. Finally, they’ll turn into adult beetles.

Do mealworms smell gross? Are they filled with germs?

Mealworms are clean and odorless. They’re not slimy and, compared to other animals, they’re not very germy. However, you will still want to wash your hands after handling them.

What do mealworms eat?

Mealworms love grain products. They especially like bran and oats. Bran can be found in cereals like Raisin Bran. Oats can be found in cereals like Cheerios and oatmeal.

Be careful not to feed your mealworms any sugar-coated cereals. The sugar can be harmful to them.

Do they need water?

All animals do need some water, but mealworms don’t need very much. They like a dry habitat. Instead of giving them a dish of water, you should give them foods that have water in them. A few small bits of potato or carrot should provide your mealworms with all of the water they need.

Where do I keep my mealworms?

If you only have a few mealworms, you may want to keep your them in a small, plastic Tupperware container. Use a pin to poke a lots of tiny holes in the top so fresh air can get in. Don’t make the holes too big, or your mealworms could escape.

If you have lots of mealworms, you may want to keep them in a 10-gallon, glass aquarium. If you do this, you won’t need to place a lid on top because the mealworms won’t be able to climb up the glass sides.
How do I prepare the home for my mealworms?

Fill the bottom of your container with bran or oats, an inch or two deep. You’ll find that the mealworms like to bury themselves in food. Also place a few carrot slices or potato slices in there too.

Keep your mealworms' home away from bright lights and windows. Indirect light is best for their survival. Just lay your mealworm habitat on a quiet shelf and they should be very happy.

Can I touch them or move them?

Be very gentle with your mealworms because you don’t want to harm them. The best way to pick them up is with a plastic spoon. You could also use plastic tweezers to pick them up, if you’re gentle.

How do I take care of them?

If you start to see lots of round beads (waste), it is time to change the food. Take your mealworms out of the habitat and replace the bottom of their home with fresh bran or oats.

Also, change the carrots and potato bits every couple of days so they don’t get too dry or moldy.

Will my mealworms change?

The mealworms may change into the pupa stage. If this happens, you’ll notice that they can wiggle their legs, but they won’t be able to walk or eat. During this stage their body is changing and they are becoming adult beetles.

After the pupa stage, they will emerge as adult beetles. You’ll notice that their bodies have changed shape and color. You may want to separate adult beetles from the mealworms by placing them in a separate habitat. They’ll eat the same oats and bran they did as larva.

Adult beetles may lay eggs. The eggs are very tiny and you may not be able to see them easily. If you wait a week or two, new mealworms will hatch from the eggs and the cycle will start again.

The chart below shows how long they may stay in each stage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>egg</td>
<td>4-18 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>larva (mealworm)</td>
<td>6-9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupa</td>
<td>6-18 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult</td>
<td>2-3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. A mealworm is...
   a. a dry, brown worm
   b. a beetle in the pupa stage
   c. a type of worm with legs
   d. a darkling beetle in the larval stage

2. The best way to pick up mealworms is....
   a. with your fingers
   b. with a spoon
   c. with two pencils
   d. You should never pick up mealworms.

3. What do mealworms eat?
   a. fresh grass and leaves
   b. twigs and bark
   c. other insects
   d. cereal

4. Which of these would make the best home for a mealworm?
   a. a wood box with holes in the sides
   b. a cage made of screen
   c. a glass box with no top
   d. cloth bag

5. Why should you add a carrot or potato to your mealworm’s habitat?

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6. Bob is worried that his mealworm is sick because it looks shriveled up. It cannot walk or move, but it does wiggle its legs a little. Megan tells Bob not to worry. She says the mealworm is not sick.

Explain why Megan thinks the mealworm will be okay.

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   The mealworm can get water from the carrot or potato.

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   Explain why Megan thinks the mealworm will be okay.
   Megan knows that the mealworm has probably entered into pupa stage. Soon it will be an adult beetle.