

Culturing Snails

Live Material Care Guide

Background

Snail is a common name used for a large proportion of the Gastropoda class that have coiled shells. Marine snails make up the majority of the species while land or terrestrial snails are more widely known. The majority of snails are herbivores but some terrestrial snails are omnivores or sometimes carnivores. Most snails have thousands of tooth-like structures found on their *radula*. The radula is similar to a tongue, it works like a file tearing the food into small pieces. See Figure 1 for general body structure.

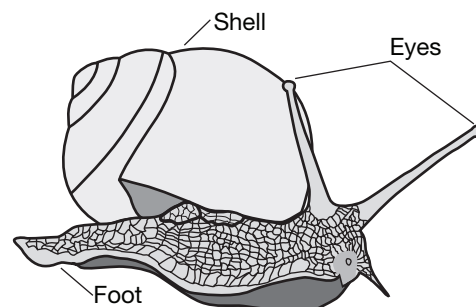


Figure 1. Snail General Structure

Culturing and Media

Freshwater snails should be cultured in an aquarium or glass jar containing a layer of small pebbles. Add a few small aquatic plants and fill with spring, well or dechlorinated tap water. Every couple days replace a portion of the water and occasionally check that the calcium levels are adequate. The lighting level is dependent on the needs of the plants and algae in the aquarium. Pond snails feed on aquatic plants or algae. Most other snails will not eat healthy aquarium plants. Lettuce leaves or flaked fish food added several times weekly will enable Ramshorn snails to thrive. Uneaten foods should be removed promptly to prevent contamination of the water.

Snails are self-fertilizing hermaphrodites that reproduce rapidly if conditions are right. They prefer alkaline, hard water which contains a lot of calcium (needed for shell growth). In order to limit a population boom, avoid overfeeding the fish. Feed only enough fish food so that the fish are done after 3–4 minutes. The clown loach is a natural predator that can be added to the tank if necessary. One final control method is to place a lettuce leaf on the bottom of the tank overnight. Euthanize all the snails that are on the lettuce leaf the following morning.

Some snails like to fill their shells with air and float to the top of the tank. You may see them release the bubble and plummet to the bottom. So if the snail is floating, it is not necessarily dead. Remove the snail from the water and smell it. Dead snails reek. Living snails do not.

Snails can live for years and grow to several inches in diameter.

Safety Precautions

Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after working with snails. Follow all laboratory safety guidelines.

Disposal

Please consult your current *Flinn Scientific Catalog/Reference Manual* for general guidelines and specific procedures, and review all federal, state and local regulations that may apply, before proceeding. Snails may be kept in an aquarium after observation is over. Deceased snails may be disposed of according to Flinn Suggested Biological Waste Method VI. Never release snails to the wild. Many species may be invasive.

Materials for *Culturing Snails* are available from Flinn Scientific, Inc.

Catalog No.	Description
LM1106	Pond Snails
LM1179	Ramshorn Snails

Consult your *Flinn Scientific Catalog/Reference Manual* for current prices.