



## Introduction Guide To The Care Of Giant African Land Snails

**Scientific Name:** Achatina fulica (East African Land Snail), Achatina marginata (West African Land Snails), Achatina achatina (Tiger Snails). Care for all is similar. A common abbreviation for giant African land snails is GALS.

**Life Span:** Average about 5-6 years, but can live up to 10 years.

**Size:** The smaller of these snails (Achatina fulica) grow to be about 3-4 inches long shell length), while the larger ones (Achatina achatina) can have a shell up to 10-11 inches long (in a snail this size the body stretched out would be about 14-15 inches!).

**Appearance:** GALS internal organs are positioned inside of their shell and their body is a strong muscle that allows them to move through its contractions. If you watch your snail crawl up the wall of his tank, you will be able to see these contractions ripple through his body. GALS do not have teeth, instead they have flat cartilaginous plates, called radula, with which they grind off chunks of their food. The radula has 140 rows, each containing 129 teeth but in spite of this, snails cannot bite you. GALS are hermaphrodites, meaning that they possess both male and female reproductive organs and are able to fertilise each other - which can result in up to 500 eggs being laid per snail.

**Temperament and Handling:** These snails do not seem to mind being handled, but you must be gentle with them and avoid damaging the shell. Moistening your hands before holding them is recommended by some owners. The shell is most fragile at the base where it is next to the body, so try to avoid picking them up by this part of the shell, and be careful to provide solid support to the body and shell. You can also spray your hand with water to make it more comfortable for the snail. If the snail is on the side of the tank, spray water on and around the snail, ease your fingers underneath it and lift it off gently. Don't try to pull the snail off by its shell - you could pull it out of its shell! Don't pick up the snail by the front growing part of the shell which is very delicate and easily damaged. You can clean your snail in luke warm water using a fine paint brush but be careful not to get water into its breathing hole just inside its shell.

**Housing:** A good sized, well-ventilated plastic or glass tank with a secure lid makes a good home (for full grown snails count on a 5-10 gallon tank as a minimum). Provide a 1-2 inch layer of soil or compost as a substrate (allow the snails to burrow). Pieces of wood, cork bark or clay flower pots provide an interesting landscape and hiding spots for the snails. The substrate will need to be cleaned out weekly. Mist the tank to keep the substrate slightly damp (not wet, though).



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## Pets and reptiles

**Heating and Lighting:** Although they come from a tropical climate, GALS seem to adapt well to lower temperatures. Their tank can be kept anywhere from 65-84 F (18-29 C) but 70-77 F (21-25 C) is a good range to aim for. If you need to heat the tank use heat strips available for reptile habitats, under half the tank only. Keep in mind that if you are heating the cage it will dry out faster and you will need to make sure the humidity is maintained. Giant African Land Snails will go into hibernation if temperatures get too low. The membrane (epiphragm) is made of dried mucus and helps keep the snail moist. In warm weather Giant African Land Snails will go into summer hibernation (estivation) if they get too dry. You should spray your snails daily with luke warm water to prevent this from happening.

**Feeding:** GALS mostly need a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits, such as cucumber, lettuce (remember, dark leafy types of lettuce such as romaine are more nutritious than head lettuce such as iceberg lettuce), peppers, apple, nectarine, grapes, banana, peach, plums, melon, papaya, leafy greens (e.g. spinach, kale), green beans, corn on the cob, tomatoes, etc. Some will also eat brown bread and moistened dog biscuits. Snails need calcium supplementation to keep their shell strong, so provide a piece of cuttlebone or other calcium supplement (check the bird section at the pet store). Providing water in a bowl is not a strict necessity as long as the tank is misted regularly (they get lots of moisture from their foods). However, a shallow bowl can be provided - one designed for reptiles with the stepped edges is ideal to keep the snail from slipping into the bowl.

**PLEASE BE AWARE:** GALS are an extremely invasive species. They breed rapidly, tolerate fairly extreme conditions and have voracious appetites, making them a significant threat to both crops and native wildlife. As such, it is illegal to release GALS into the wild in the UK, while in many other countries it is illegal to even keep them as pets. There are a huge number of unwanted snails looking for good homes and so we do not recommend or encourage breeding them intentionally.. When you think that all these snails and many more are all in need of homes, you can see that breeding is irresponsible and the need to regularly check for, and correctly dispose of, eggs is absolutely essential, put any eggs laid in a secure tub and put them in the freezer for 48 hours, they can then be thrown away. The eggs must be disposed of responsibly; simply throwing them away is illegal.

Please note that this is only an introductory guide based on our opinions and experience, we advise you to continually research and learn as much as possible from as many sources as you can, every animal is different and new care and information is always being developed and found 😊