Isopods Care Guide

Tiny armored rolly-pollies you keep as a colony

Great first pet



HOME	CARE TIME	COST	LIFESPAN	CUDDLINESS
Small space	**A little**	**$3–$10/mo (whole group)**	**1–3 years (the colony renews itself)**	**Some cuddles**

AWAKE WHEN	HANDLING	COMPANY	KID-FRIENDLY	ALLERGIES
Night owl	**Gentle, supervised handling**	**Needs a friend**	★★★★☆	**Allergy-friendly**

Setting up costs about $10–$40 up front, before the monthly costs.

Isopods — the fancy cousins of the backyard rolly-polly — are one of the cheapest, easiest pets there is, and collecting the colorful kinds (orange, zebra-striped, even "rubber ducky") has become a real hobby. They live in a shoebox-sized bin, eat fallen leaves and veggie scraps, can't bite or sting, and quietly multiply into a busy little colony you can watch and gently hold.

Is an isopods a good pet for kids?

Quick answer: Isopods are great pets for most kids.

- **Best for:** one of the cheapest pets you can keep, colorful collector types like Zebra and Rubber Ducky
- **Keep in mind:** not a cuddly pet — more watch than hold
- **Lifespan:** 1–3 years (the colony renews itself)
- **Ongoing cost:** about $3–$10/mo (setup & vet extra)

Company: Isopods are a colony pet — you keep a whole little herd in one bin, and they do best with plenty of friends.

Is an isopod colony right for us?

Why you'll love an isopod colony

- One of the cheapest pets you can keep
- Totally harmless — no bites, no stings
- Colorful collector types like Zebra and Rubber Ducky
- The colony renews itself year after year

Things to know

- Not a cuddly pet — more watch than hold
- Most active at night
- Individual isopods only live a few years
- Easy to over-wet or dry out the bin

The honest answer: Yes — about as close to a no-fail pet as this site gets, but it's a colony you watch and mist, not an animal that knows you.

👍 Get one if...

- You're spending pocket money, not a monthly budget
- Your kids would rather run a colony than keep one pet
- Your pet care has to fit into five minutes a week
- You're hoping to postpone a first pet goodbye

👎 Think again if...

- You want one animal to name and bond with
- Your kids need a pet that knows them
- You can't keep one corner of the bin damp
- You'd pay Rubber Ducky prices for a first culture

How to care for your Isopods

🏡 Home
A ventilated plastic bin or small tank with a few inches of substrate, kept damp on one side and drier on the other, plus leaf litter and bark hides.

🥗 Food & water
Dead leaves and rotting wood are the staple; add small bits of vegetables and a pinch of fish flakes or calcium now and then.

🩺 Health
Keep one corner moist (they breathe with gills!), don't let the bin flood or fully dry out, and remove moldy food.

🤲 Handling & play
Gentle, brief handling is fine — let them walk over your hand, then return them to the bin and wash your hands.

🤧 Allergies
No fur, feathers, or dander — isopods are a great choice for allergy-sensitive families.

✅ Before you bring an isopod colony home

Isopods are a colony pet — a whole little herd of armored rolly-pollies in a bin. They're one of the cheapest, easiest pets there is, and a happy colony renews itself for years.

🏠 Room at home

All they need is a shoebox-sized ventilated bin or small tank on a shelf, out of direct sun. Pick the spot before you pick the bugs.

🛒 Supplies to get first

Get a ventilated bin or small tank, coco fiber or organic soil, dried leaf litter, a piece of cork bark or egg carton to hide under, a cuttlebone for calcium, and a mister.

🩺 Finding a vet

Vets don't treat isopods — the colony is the patient. Good moisture, leaf litter, and calcium prevent nearly every problem.

💰 Money & emergencies

No insurance needed for a pet that costs a few dollars — just keep spare leaf litter on hand and the bin will look after itself.

🗒️ Your routine — tick them off

☀️ Every day

- ☐ A quick peek that the damp corner is still damp

📅 Every week

- ☐ Mist the damp side
- ☐ Offer a small veggie piece and remove old food
- ☐ Top up leaf litter

🌙 Now & then

- ☐ Refresh some substrate
- ☐ Check the calcium supply
- ☐ Watch how the colony is growing

💰 **Monthly cost:** Tiny: a plastic bin, coco fiber, leaf litter, and a starter colony — the cheapest setup on this whole site.

🤩 Fun facts

- Isopods aren't insects — they're land crustaceans that breathe through gills, like tiny crabs that moved ashore.
- Some isopods can roll into a perfect armored ball when they're startled.
- Isopods molt in two halves — first the back end, then a few days later the front!

📚 Where this comes from

Vets, charities & official guidance

- Pillbug, Armadillidium vulgare (EENY-630) — UF/IFAS Extension (ask.ifas.ufl.edu)
- Pillbugs and sowbugs — UC Statewide IPM Program (ipm.ucanr.edu)
- Sowbugs and pillbugs — Clemson Cooperative Extension (hgic.clemson.edu)

Keeper & species-community guides

- Introduction to crustaceans — Amateur Entomologists' Society (amentsoc.org)
- Establishing a bioactive clean-up crew — ReptiFiles (reptifiles.com)

This guide is general care information for families, not veterinary advice. Every pet is different: if yours seems unwell, call a vet.
Sources checked August 2026; this guide matches the web page as of Nov 21, 2026.
More on the website (the full care guide, questions families ask, types and breeds, and the "Am I ready?" check):
whatpetshouldiget.com/pets/isopod.html