



Raising Crickets ¹

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Crickets are a preferred bait for many types of fishes. They can be captured in open areas or under lights at night or purchased from bait shops or laboratory suppliers, but many anglers prefer to rear their own. During the warmer parts of the year, crickets can be reared by an angler for use as bait. The equipment needed is simple, inexpensive and easily maintained, and rearing procedures are relatively simple. Approximately 400 crickets can be reared every three months for every 450 square inches of rearing space (about the size of a five gallon bucket).

Materials and Equipment

The following materials are needed to make a cricket rearing facility.

- one of more well-cleaned grease, paint or food containers
- window screening
- tape or other attachment mechanisms
- chick watering fount (or equivalent)
- sand
- excelsior or coarse, dry hay
- poultry laying mash
- saucer or tray
- rain shelter
- insect control

Setting up a Cricket Rearing Facility

Large grease, paint or food containers approximately 18 inches in diameter make excellent rearing containers. Start by thoroughly cleaning the containers. If metal containers are used, sand the top few inches of the inside of the can to a smooth finish and wax it with a hard furniture wax. This helps to keep the cricket in the can. Prepare a piece of window screening to fit tightly over the top of the can. A firmly attached screen will prevent entry by unwanted pests and keep the crickets inside. Add about 4 to 6 inches of clean, dry sand to the bottom of the can and moisten the sand until it feels damp to the touch. Place a small glass poultry watering fount (basically a glass jar turned upside down in a pan) in the center of the rearing container, and fill the pan with cotton batting to a level just above the water level. Set one or more

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saucers or small trays of laying mash on the sand and cover the sand with about 4 or 5 inches of excelsior or coarse hay, pulling it up around the saucers and watering fount. Be careful not to create a siphon that will cause the fount to drain into the sand and cause the sand to become excessively moist. Stock each container with 20 to 30 adult crickets, about half of them males and half females. Female crickets can be recognized by the presence of a long ovipositor protruding from the end of the abdomen. Adult crickets have wings. Young crickets can be stocked, but the time required for the first crop of bait crickets will be longer. Place the container in an area where it will maintain a temperature of 80 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and arrange to protect it from rain if the chamber is set up outdoors. If ants are a problem in the area, use an insecticide or some type of barrier to prevent their attacking the crickets.

Rearing Crickets

Normally the sand need not be moistened again for about three months. Crickets need relatively dry sand to have the young remain free from disease. Clean the watering fount, replacing the water and cotton every four to eight weeks. Keep food readily available at all times. Plan on replacing food every two to three weeks when crickets are small and every four to five days when they are larger. Replace food as needed. Adult crickets lay eggs at intervals of approximately 30 to 50 days, laying them in slightly moist sand. The eggs hatch in 15 to 25 days, and the young crickets grow very rapidly at the prescribed temperatures. They reach bait size in about a month of growth at that temperature, and they will reach sexual maturity in one or two months. They can survive, but will grow and mature much more slowly, at temperatures significantly above or below that range. Shade will help to keep temperatures down during hot weather, and artificial heat, like a low wattage bulb suspended inside the container, can be used to raise the temperature under cooler conditions. **Caution: The heat from a light bulb placed too close to the excelsior or hay may cause a fire!**

Two to four crops of crickets can be reared in each container without cleaning the container. Generally, larger crops will be obtained if the containers are cleaned and restocked with adults after every second crop of bait crickets.

Additional Information Sources

Many sources of information can be used to further your production of crickets. You might start with E. Lawrence Palmer (1954) *Crickets as Bait*, from the National Wildlife Federation, Earl F. Kennamer, Leaflet YA-11, Auburn University Extension Service, Auburn, AL, or D. T. Gardner, *Fish Bait Production*, Circular E-33, Cooperative Extension Service, Auburn University, Auburn, AL. Consult your local Cooperative Extension Agent for additional information if needed.

Extensions and Connections to Other Programs

Clearly, rearing crickets can have a direct link to entomology and conservation or natural history programs. It could also provide an entry into entrepreneurship programs if the participant decides to raise crickets for sale to bait shops or direct sales to anglers. Woodworking or other engineering projects could become related if building projects are included.