

Freshwater Leech

Genus: *Placobdella* sp.
Family: Glossiphoniids
Order: Rhynchobdellida
Class: Hirudinea
Phylum: Annelida
Kingdom: Animalia



Conditions for Customer Ownership

We are a USDA compliant facility and hold all necessary permits to transport our organisms. Each state is assisted by the USDA to determine which organisms can be transported across state lines. Some organisms may require end-user permits. Please contact your local regulatory authorities with questions or concerns. To access permit conditions, [click here](#).

Never purchase living specimens without having a disposition strategy in place. Live specimens should not be released into the wild! Please dispose of any unwanted organisms using the guidelines below.

Primary Hazard Considerations

Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after you handle your leech, its food, or anything it has touched. Do not handle leeches with bare hands. Although freshwater leeches do not generally attach to humans, as opposed to medicinal leeches, gloves should be used when handling them.

Availability

- Leeches are available year round, and can generally be found in freshwater lakes and ponds. They are not found in areas that have currents or water disturbances.
- Leeches are shipped in a jar with pond water. Upon arrival, loosen the lid to allow for gas exchange. A leech can be stored in its shipping container in the refrigerator for 3–4 days before it needs to be transferred to a new home.

Captive Care

Habitat:

- Any escape-proof container with holes in the lid for oxygen exchange. You can use an aquarium, terrarium, or even a plastic 1–5 gallon bucket. Fill the container $\frac{3}{4}$ full of de-chlorinated spring or pond water. Tap water can be de-chlorinated by letting it sit out for 48 hours or by adding a de-chlorinating solution (such as Fluval® Aqua-plus 470308-824). Using an air pump and air stone is recommended, but not required.
- Leeches should be kept at room temperature (65–75°F). For long-term storage (more than a month), they can be placed in a refrigerator as an alternative housing option.
- Lights are not required as leeches are nocturnal.

Care:

- Freshwater leeches are carnivorous predators that feed on small invertebrates like worms (470183-744), snails (470313-226), and insect larvae. They are also known for eating amphibian and fish eggs as well. Leeches can also be fed blood (rabbit, cow, or sheep). Put some blood in a Petri dish inside of a pan and introduce the leech to the pan. Leeches will also eat raw liver that you can buy at a grocery store. They should be fed about once a month.
- Their water should be changed weekly to keep levels of toxins and decaying matter and debris at a minimum. Remove half of the old water from the bucket and replace with fresh de-chlorinated water.

Information

- Freshwater leeches are hermaphrodites, which mean that they have both male and female reproductive organs. Leeches intertwine together, each releasing sperm into the others' clitellum. A cocoon is formed where the eggs will develop until they hatch. It generally takes about two weeks for the eggs to hatch into little leeches. Reproduction in captivity is rarely experienced. A leech can live from 2–8 years.
- Freshwater leeches have sense organs on the body and head that allow easy detection of prey. They can perceive changes in temperature, vibrations, light intensity, and chemicals with these organs.
- Due to slow digestion, freshwater leeches can survive a fast period of 10 months in between meals. They hide in dark areas to complete this function. They can basically hibernate in the mud during cold periods.
- Leeches can be found throughout the world, but this particular type of leech is native to the Northeastern U.S. and Southeastern Canada. They can be found in freshwater ponds, lakes, and slow moving rivers and creeks in these areas.

Disposition

We do not recommend releasing any laboratory animal into the wild.

- Adoption is the preferred disposition for any living animal.
- If the leech must be euthanized at the end of study, follow one of these procedures:
- Put the organism into a container or bag and freeze for 48 hours.
- Place the organism in 70% isopropyl alcohol for 24 hours.
- A deceased specimen should be disposed of as soon as possible. Consult your school's recommended procedures for disposal. In general, dead invertebrates should be handled as little as possible or with gloves, wrapped in an opaque plastic bag that is sealed (tied tightly) before being placed in a general garbage container away from students.