

# Praying Mantis

Mantids are very important insect predators and will devour anything they can capture. They capture their prey by stealth; their color and shape allow them to blend into the background, and they wait with their front legs raised in a "praying" position. When prey comes within 4 inches of their reach, mantids can strike in 5 hundredths of a second, faster than the eye can see. They are also capable of holding prey in one claw and striking with the other

Females lay eggs in an egg case called an ootheca; a liquid secreted from the ovipositor is mixed with air to make a froth that solidifies into a case as hard as a walnut shell around the eggs. The egg cases are deposited in fall, and the eggs overwinter in the hardened ootheca, which provides insulation and protection from ants. The egg cases are usually wrapped around stems of shrubs and grasses; they are oblong masses about 1 inch long. You can collect these egg cases and leave them in a cool area protected from predators and precipitation. If you want them to hatch, they should be put in a jar in a shady spot outside.

While mantids are important predators, they are not very discriminatory and will consume both pests and other beneficial insects. Sometimes people purchase the ootheca egg cases from insectaries, but this is often a waste of money. No matter how many mantids you release, in a few weeks only one will be left due to migration and cannibalism.



ADULT PRAYING MANTIS

NOTICE: Raptorial front legs for grabbing prey



OOTHECA EGG CASE

SIZE |—————|  
Up to 3 inches

Pictures from

[http://entomology.unl.edu/images/beneficials/mantids/bene\\_mantids.htm](http://entomology.unl.edu/images/beneficials/mantids/bene_mantids.htm)

<http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek001008.html>