

Need a Low-Maintenance Pet? Try a Tarantula!

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**By V. Berba Velasco Jr., Ph.D.**

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If you're like me, then you don't really have the luxury of keeping a high-maintenance pet such as a dog. Even a less demanding pet such as a cat might be beyond your time constraints. Fish tanks can be difficult too, since it's easy to under-estimate the time and effort involved in keeping them clean. So what options do you have?

Well, you could try a snake or one of the hardier lizard varieties. My personal favorites, however, are tarantulas. That's right—those big, hairy, eight-legged freaks.

Contrary to popular belief, tarantulas are really not deadly; in fact, there are no known instances of anyone dying from a tarantula bite. In addition, most of the pet store specimens that you'll encounter are exceedingly docile, and will generally not bite unless they are severely provoked.

The most common variety available is the Chilean rose hair tarantula (*Grammastola rosea*), which is notoriously gentle and easy to handle. It is also known to have fairly mild venom, and almost never bites. Other docile and readily available species include the Honduran curly hair tarantula (*Brachypelma albopilosum*) and the Guyana pinktoe tarantula (*Avicularia avicularia*).

Unlike a dog or a cat, these animals do not require much care. They can go for weeks without food or water, although regular care is still recommended. They do not generate much waste either, and so cleaning their cages is easy as well. Some species do have rather specific humidity requirements, but the most common pet store varieties are not so demanding. They also require very little space, and most of them can be kept in plastic shoebox-sized containers. Make sure that their lids fit tightly though, since these animals can be quite good at escaping.

I do recommend reading up on tarantula care, so as to learn the proper care requirements for the specimen that you choose. Be aware that some species can be quite aggressive, and are not recommended for beginners. These species are less commonly available though, and are generally

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obtained via mail order. If in doubt, start with a Chilean rose hair, as this is an excellent beginner species.

Owners should be aware that even within docile species, there can be some individuals that are more aggressive than others. In addition, there is always the possibility of an allergic reaction if you are bitten. In theory, this could result in a potentially fatal anaphylactic shock, although I am not aware of any circumstances in which this has actually happened. For these reasons, new owners should learn how to read a tarantula's body language, and should stay away from species that have a reputation for biting without provocation.

Also, do remember that you never have to actually hold the tarantulas—just as you never have to actually hold your aquarium fish. I recommend reading up on handling techniques, so that you can move the animals around without having to touch them. This can be helpful for those who are squeamish, or who simply wish to be cautious. When in doubt, err on the side of safety.

If you're not intimidated by the prospect of keeping one of these wondrous creatures, then I recommend them highly. They can be quite addictive, and they never fail to entertain.

V. Berba Velasco Jr., Ph.D. is a senior electrical and software engineer at Cellular Technology Ltd (

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neighborhood children have referred to him as the "Crocodile Hunter" though, due to his impressive menagerie of magnificent arachnids.

### **The Top 10 Reasons to Own a Pet**

**By Kelly Redmond**

#### **The Top 10 Reasons to Own a Pet by Kelly Redmond**

Americans love their pets, but do they ever think about "why?"

1. A pet teaches you responsibility.
2. You can get lots of exercise by walking your pet.
3. If you get lonely, you have a friend to play with.
4. You can save a pet's life by adopting one from a shelter.

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5. The pet needs a friend.
  6. A pet always greets you at the door even when you've had a bad day.
  7. When your Mom makes a terrible dinner, your pet can clean it up.
  8. A pet can guard your house.
  9. A pet can make a boring car trip much more fun.
  10. The pet will love you, no matter what!
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About the Submitter This piece was originally submitted by Kelly Redmond, 4th grade (almost), who can be reached at [info@catholicschoolkid.com](mailto:info@catholicschoolkid.com), or visited on the web. Kelly Redmond wants you to know: I am one of the creators of CatholicSchoolKid.com and am starting 4th grade in the fall. I like to sing, play piano and train my three dogs. . The original source is: CatholicSchoolKid.com. Link: [http://www.catholicschoolkid.com/kellys\\_page.htm](http://www.catholicschoolkid.com/kellys_page.htm)

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