



LET'S TALK ABOUT

NATURALISTIC ENCLOSURES

AN APH CARE GUIDE

By Happy Quills

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INTRODUCTION

Why chose bioactive or naturalistic?

As pet owners we are constantly learning and improving our husbandry to allow our pets to live fulfilling, healthy lives. Offering a “lifelike” enclosure provides enrichment and the chance for them to display some natural behaviours that we otherwise might not see in different types of enclosure. These types of enclosure cater to a hedgehog’s needs. They allow burrowing, foraging for food, creating nests etc. They stimulate a hogs natural behaviour, so are believed to help their health both mentally and physically (although there is no research to support this). Many APH owners are interested in creating a naturalistic or bio active enclosure for their hog, but do not know where to start.

The Bioactive Enclosure

A bioactive enclosure has its own mini eco system. There will be natural elements such as plants, and a substrate mix of soil/sand in which invertebrates (the Clean Up Crew or CUC) live. The CUC is responsible for breaking down the waste, thus creating a natural environment. A bioactive enclosure should mimic the natural habitat of the hedgehog. However, be warned, it is extremely difficult to maintain this in such a small enclosure. A full bioactive enclosure for a hog is very difficult to maintain, and is not something we advocate at Happy Quills. Due to several issues with bioactive enclosures we are not going to describe how to create one in this guide, just to educate you on the disadvantages of this type of enclosure.

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Cons of a Bio active Enclosure

- Hogs are a high waste animal and the clean-up crew struggle to process the amount of waste, meaning human intervention is needed for spot cleaning, which kind of defeats the purpose of a bioactive enclosure.
- It is very difficult to create a bio cycle that can cope with their waste load without reaching high levels of ammonia which can cause respiratory infections.
- In UK we recommend CHE due to fluctuations in temperature. If you use a CHE in a bioactive enclosure, it creates humidity. High humidity causes respiratory infections in hogs. A hedgehog needs a very low humidity around 40%-50% and bio enclosures are generally much higher.
- The hogs generally eat the clean-up crew as enclosed in such a small space. It is expensive to keep replacing the clean-up crew and difficult to create an established colony. It can also stop you being able to restrict food if your hedgehog is obese.
- The hogs need an arid environment, this creates difficulty in maintaining moisture for the clean-up crew to thrive in. There is a very fine balance between the environment being too dry for the clean up crew to thrive, to being too moist which can cause mould and health problems for your hedgehog.
- They dig up the plants, this can be costly in replacing them.
- It can take weeks, more often months for an enclosure to become anywhere near being fully self-sustaining. It is not advised to put your hedgehog in the enclosure until the colony of clean up crew is established.
- A bio active environment does not mean less work, you still need to turn the soil, occasionally replace the substrate and spot clean the viv.
- Cost and effort involved in initial set up is high.
- Difficult to track health in bio active enclosure. You would still need a back up enclosure if you needed to closely monitor your hogs food intake or poop, treat for parasites etc.
- These types of set ups often create mould and fungi that can be dangerous to your hedgehog.
- The clean up crew can escape. For those who are insect squeamish you might not appreciate finding a rogue cockroach wandering around your room.

The Naturalistic Enclosure

If you are interested in making your hedgehogs home similar to their natural environment creating a more naturalistic set up is a much more feasible option. A set up that has natural elements such as wood, rocks, occasionally live plants. This type of enclosure can have a natural substrate, such as soil, but often uses wood chips (not shavings) or paper bedding for easier cleaning. The substrate should be loose, so the hogs can dig and display naturalistic behaviour. This could be coco coir, coconut husk, or bedding such as finacard, carefresh, eco nest, back 2 nature etc. Remember a hog still needs a wheel in a naturalistic enclosure.

Other naturalistic elements to add : This is where your landscaping and creative skills get going. Add cork bark, cork tunnels, stones, logs, leaf litter (shop bought, not from outside), wood, dried reed/grasses etc to your enclosure. A Large piece of cork bark or tunnel can be used as a hide. Please ensure there are no twigs/sticks that a hog could injure their eyes on.

If you do not want to pot plants in the substrate airplants are an easy option. They can be glued to wood or cork bark (use animal safe glue). You can also just have the plants in plant pots so not as easy to knock over/dig up.

Grasses can be used both live and dead to give the enclosure a savannah look.

Fake plants can be used. These are a good option and can be easily sourced by looking for reptile plants/ aquarium, terrarium plants etc. These go a long way to making the enclosure look as natural as possible.

Safe plants for hedgehogs:

Airplants (Tillandsia)

Grasses such as Carex, Stipa

Sansevieria

Echeveria

Chlorophytum

Beaucarnea recurvata



