

# Care Cards

## Tortoises



Many varieties of tortoise are available in the pet trade today. The overall care is similar for most species with the primary difference being the adult size of the reptile. It is important when purchasing any tortoise to make sure you will have enough room to adequately house the adult animal, and have taken into account the average life span of many tortoise species is 30 years.

A baby or juvenile tortoise can be housed in a large tub or child's play pool. Adults should be housed outdoors in appropriate sized pens. When constructing a tortoise pen, you should keep in mind that a tortoise can climb up a corner and escape from their enclosure. To help prevent this, all corners should be covered by a triangular piece of plywood or some other solid substance. This will not only prevent escape, but it will also provide a shaded area for cooling during the day.

Tortoises like to roam during the day and slick enclosure floors will prevent proper muscle development, therefore a substrate item should be provided to help strengthen the animals limbs when walking. Commonly used substrate items include hay or grass, alfalfa pellets, small wood chips, and dirt. Juveniles should not be housed on sand or any other drying agent because these items may lead to dehydration.

Normal daytime temperatures for most tortoises is between 70 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit, with a basking area between 85 and 95 degrees. Nighttime temperatures should not get below 60 degrees.

Tortoises are vegetarians and should be fed a variety of items to prevent boredom. Fiber is an important aspect of tortoise nutrition and should be provided on a daily basis. The diet should be made of grasses, succulent plants, blossoms, and fruit. The majority of the tortoises daily intake should be grasses and hay (timothy, Bermuda, or fescue), leafy green vegetables (romaine, collards, mustard, turnip, endive, and dandelions), cactus, alfalfa, clovers, mulberry leaves, grape leaves, tomatoes, parsley, carrots, squash, and occasionally fruit. Tortoises graze during the day and should have food provided all day long. Additionally a balanced vitamin and mineral supplement should be provided to any juvenile or breeding female tortoise.

Calcium is an important aspect of any healthy tortoise. A good diet will maintain a normal calcium:phosphorous ratio of 2-3:1. This can be aided by limiting the use of non-leafy vegetables and fruit. Additionally, spinach, kale, and rhubarb leaves contain high levels of oxalates which can bind to calcium and prevent its absorption.

Tortoises will obtain most of their water needs from the leafy vegetables. I recommend soaking your tortoise in warm water deep enough to cover the plastron for 15 minutes twice a week. Many tortoises will actively drink water when soaking.

All tortoises require ultraviolet lighting for proper calcium metabolism. When housed indoors, the use of a good quality, full-spectrum ultraviolet light is necessary. When housed outdoors and provided access to direct, unfiltered sunlight, artificial lighting will not be needed. Remember, when housing any reptile outside, a cool shaded area must be provided to prevent heat stress and possible death.

