

CARE OF TORTOISES

HOUSING: Juveniles may be kept in aquariums, adults will require more spacious housing, ranging from large pen enclosures to outdoor yards depending upon species. Tortoises should have access to outdoors whenever possible. Provide visual security in the form of a hide box or artificial or edible foliage. Particulate substrate small enough for the tortoise to ingest is not recommended with the exception of edible hay-based pellets. We have seen impactions requiring surgery with bark chips, gravel, and other substrates. Provide humidity appropriate to species.

LIGHTING: Provide a 12:12 light cycle for all reptiles. Reptiles must have total darkness at night in order to maintain a healthy feeding response. All growing tortoises require a source of UVB, whether from a quality lamp or natural direct sunlight (best-30 minutes per week is enough).

HEATING: The optimal temperature zone for most species is 72-95F. This range should be provided as a gradient across the enclosure with the warmest point where the animal prefers to rest most for basking. The coolest part of the enclosure should never drop below the low end of the range-this will affect the animal's ability to digest food, metabolize nutrients and fight off illness. Hot rocks should never be used.

FEEDING: Tortoises are strict herbivores. This doesn't mean they won't go for dog or cat food. Never feed animal protein to herbivorous species-it will damage their kidneys. Tortoises in the wild feed most on scrub-type plants, getting water from occasional succulents and fruit. The best basic diet for all tortoise species consists of a reptile salad (we have a separate handout on this) mixed 50:50 with short cut grass hay (we carry a great product just for this purpose). Calcium supplementation is necessary. Always provide water for drinking and soaking.

VETERINARY CARE: Annual exams with fecal exams done every six months. Please always call your tortoise's veterinarian with questions and concerns. This is a better resource than pet stores or the internet, with one exception: for more specific detailed care instructions tailored to the species of your tortoise, visit the World Chelonian Trust website at Chelonia.org.