

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Vivarium
- Suitable substrate & cage furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometers x2
- UVB light source & suitable reflector
- Food & supplements
- Food & water bowls
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

NEVER RELEASE ANIMALS INTO THE WILD

Companion animals must never be released into the wild. It is illegal and, for most species, will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death as they are not native to this country. Any animals that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 requires that all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their animals. If you own, or are responsible for, a reptile or amphibian and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

The Five Animal Welfare Needs:

- **Need for a suitable environment:** *Ensuring your pet has a suitable place to live.*
- **Need for a suitable diet:** *Ensuring your pet's nutritional needs are met and that it has water to drink.*
- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns:** *Making sure your pet has what it needs to behave normally.*
- **Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals:** *Ensuring your pet has appropriate company.*
- **Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury or disease:** *Making sure your pet stays healthy.*

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Guide to caring for... Bearded dragons

Pogona sp.



Bearded dragons are gentle, intelligent and confident lizards with a lot of personality, which makes them rewarding pets. They live for up to fifteen years and grow to a maximum length of 600mm.

Bearded dragons originated in Australia but those offered as pets have been bred in captivity. The domestication process has produced animals with a high tolerance for handling in a wide range of colour and pattern variations.

Introduction

Bearded dragons are usually purchased as young animals and as a broad guideline it is recommended that a minimum age of four to five weeks is appropriate. It is not recommended to buy young bearded dragons measuring less than 9cm (excluding tail) or weighing less than 14g.

Animals should be plump and confident with bright, clean eyes and a clean cloaca. They are naturally confident animals and should be alert and active, with the head held high.

Bearded dragons may be kept on their own, in pairs or in small groups, depending on the size of the enclosure. More than one male should never be housed together as they will inevitably fight as they mature and may cause each other serious injury. Sexing young bearded dragons can be quite tricky so it is best to start with a single specimen if unsure.

Housing

Bearded dragons are large and active lizards and an adult pair will require a vivarium measuring at least 120 x 60 x 60cm (48 x 24 x 24"). Young animals can be started in a vivarium measuring 90 x 45 x 45 cms (36 x 18 x 18"). Providing the correct temperature can be maintained, glass or wooden enclosures can be used.

Temperature is very important as reptiles cannot produce their own body heat and are entirely dependent on their environment. The enclosure needs to be of sufficient size that an appropriate thermal gradient, which allows them to select the most suitable temperature, can be achieved. This will require hot spot(s) for basking and cooler areas.

Bearded dragons can produce a lot of waste so the vivarium, food and water bowls will need to be cleaned regularly.

Housing needs to be secure to prevent escape, free from hazards and well maintained.

Heating

Bearded dragons require a temperature range of up to 35°C in the basking area, down to approximately 27°C in the cooler area. At night the temperature can drop to 22°C.

Bearded dragons are active during the day and are best heated using white spot lights to create a suitable basking spot. A ceramic heater can be used to provide additional heat, if required, and can also provide a night-time heat source. Heaters should be used in conjunction with a thermostat and temperatures monitored with thermometers. It is recommended that two thermometers should be used in order to maintain an appropriate thermal gradient.

Lighting

Bearded dragons require high intensity UVb lighting to help them fully absorb and utilise calcium from their diet in order to prevent metabolic bone disease. The use of reflectors in conjunction with UV lights or tubes significantly improves UV exposure and is recommended. Bulbs or tubes will need to be replaced every six to twelve months, in accord with manufacturers' instructions, as UV output significantly decrease with time.

Basking lights are also important to provide heat.

Lights should be on a fourteen hour cycle (14 hours on, 10 hours off) to provide a natural day/night differential.



Vivarium decor

A variety of substrates can be used, including sand, bark, beech chip or even paper. Low branches, rocks and artificial plants will provide environmental enrichment and allow the animals to get closer to basking lamps. Live plants will be unlikely to withstand the heat and be eaten by livefoods so are not recommended.

Feeding

The diet should be a mix of live insects dusted with a suitable vitamin/mineral supplement with additional salad leaves, such as water cress and dandelions. Crickets and locusts are the most suitable livefood. Young bearded dragons should be fed 80% insects & 20% salad, changing to 50/50 at one year old.

Water should be provided in a shallow dish.

Health

A healthy bearded dragon should appear alert, with no discharge from eyes, nostrils or mouth. The tail should be well-rounded indicating that it is not underweight.

Health problems may include:

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD): Skeletal deformation caused by lack of calcium or vitamin D. Suitable diet and/or lighting will stop this disease from developing or worsening.

Respiratory disease: Likely to be caused by insufficient heat, symptoms include fluid or mucus from the nostrils and mouth.

Note: reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Vivarium
- Suitable substrate & cage furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometers x2
- UVB light (optional)
- Food & supplements
- Food & water bowls
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

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Animal Welfare

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The Five Animal Welfare Needs:

- **Need for a suitable environment:** *Ensuring your pet has a suitable place to live.*
- **Need for a suitable diet:** *Ensuring your pet's nutritional needs are met and that it has water to drink.*
- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns:** *Making sure your pet has what it needs to behave normally.*
- **Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals:** *Ensuring your pet has appropriate company.*
- **Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury or disease:** *Making sure your pet stays healthy.*

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Guide to caring for... Leopard geckos *Eublepharis macularius*



Leopard geckos attractive and placid lizards which do not grow very large, with a maximum length of around 20cm. All of these attributes mean they are very popular pet lizards. They may be expected to live to fifteen or more years, but have been known to live until they are thirty.

Leopard geckos originated in arid regions of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan & India but those offered as pets have been bred in captivity. The domestication process has produced animals with a high tolerance for handling in a wide range of colour and pattern variations.

Introduction

Leopard geckos are usually purchased as young animals and as a broad guideline it is recommended that a minimum age of four to five weeks is appropriate. It is not recommended to buy young leopard geckos measuring less than 6cm (excluding tail) or weighing less than 9g.

Animals should be plump and confident with bright, clean eyes and a clean cloaca. They are naturally confident animals and should be alert and active, with the head held high. The tail should appear fat and should be held off the ground when walking. The body should be well filled out with no loose skin which could indicate under nourishment.

Leopard geckos may be kept on their own, in pairs or in small groups, depending on the size of the enclosure. More than one male should never be housed together as they will inevitably fight as they mature and may cause each other injury.

Housing

Leopard geckos originated from arid semi-desert regions and, therefore, require relatively low humidity, which should not exceed 60%. The vivarium needs to have adequate ventilation to ensure that humidity does not build up as this could lead to respiratory problems.

The minimum size for a single animal would be 60 x 30 x 30 cms (24 x 12 x 12"), larger if pairs or groups are being maintained. Leopard geckos do not have a requirement to climb, but the enclosure needs to be of sufficient depth that substrate for burrowing can be provided.

In order to prevent problems with skin-shedding it is advisable to provide a hide box filled with damp (but not wet) moss.

Housing needs to be secure to prevent escape, free from hazards and well maintained.

Heating

Heating can be provided in a variety of ways with heat mats being extremely popular. It is very important that less than 50% of the total floor area is covered in order to provide a thermal gradient which allows the animal to choose the optimal temperature. Basking lights are another method of providing more intense heat and should be placed at one end of the vivarium. The hot areas in the vivarium should reach around about 30°C, with cooler areas of around 25°C to which the gecko can retreat if it requires.

Night temperatures should fall to around 20°C to provide a natural day/night cycle.

Lighting

Leopard geckos are crepuscular/nocturnal lizards and UVB lighting is not essential for their long-term maintenance if they are fed the correct diet with an adequate source of dietary calcium and vitamin D3. Exposure to day/night light cycles is, however, very important and the vivarium should be positioned so that it receives natural daylight, without being exposed to direct sunlight.

Some keepers believe that low level UVb lighting may be beneficial and a suitable tube will also render the enclosure more aesthetically pleasing. If such lighting is utilised it should be kept on for 12-14 hours a day in order to provide an appropriate day/night cycle.



Vivarium decor

A variety of substrates can be used, including sand, bark, beech chip or even paper. Low branches, rocks and artificial plants will provide environmental enrichment and allow the animals to get close to basking lamps. Live plants will be unlikely to withstand the heat and be eaten by livefoods so are not recommended.

Feeding

It is recommended that leopard geckos are fed almost exclusively on mealworms provided in a shallow "mealworm" dish. Other types of insects, such as locusts, may be used sparingly to provide variety and enrichment. Livefoods should be dusted with a suitable vitamin/mineral supplement. Adults should be offered food every other day, whilst juveniles should be offered food daily.

Health

A healthy leopard gecko should appear alert, with no discharge from eyes, nostrils or mouth. The tail should be well-rounded indicating that it is not underweight.

Health problems may include:

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD): Skeletal deformation caused by lack of calcium or vitamin D. suitable diet and/or lighting will stop this disease from developing or worsening.

Respiratory disease: Likely to be caused by insufficient heat or excess humidity, symptoms include fluid or mucus from the nostrils and mouth.

Note: reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Vivarium
- Suitable substrate & vivarium furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometer and hygrometer
- UV light (optional)
- Food & supplements
- Food & water bowls
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

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Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 requires that all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their animals. If you own, or are responsible for, a reptile or amphibian and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

The Five Animal Welfare Needs:

- **Need for a suitable environment:** *Ensuring your pet has a suitable place to live.*
- **Need for a suitable diet:** *Ensuring your pet's nutritional needs are met and that it has water to drink.*
- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns:** *Making sure your pet has what it needs to behave normally.*
- **Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals:** *Ensuring your pet has appropriate company.*
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Guide to caring for... Crested geckos *Correlophus ciliatus*



Crested geckos are one of the most popular pet reptile species. They make good pets as they are usually very docile, do not normally bite and can be handled easily. They can be kept singly or in pairs and will live between eight to twelve years, although may greatly exceed this.

Crested geckos originate from the Islands of New Caledonia in the western Pacific, where they live in cool rainforests. They are around 5-6 cm long when they hatch and will grow to about 20-25cm when mature.

Introduction

Crested geckos are one of the most popular lizards which can make extremely good pets. They originated from the New Caledonian Islands but all animals now available have been bred in captivity. Typical wild-type animals are relatively patternless and coloured in varying shades of brown and grey. Many of the animals available as pets have been specifically bred for attractive appearance and these may have spots, stripes or chevron markings and exhibit colours including deep reds, oranges and yellows.

Crested geckos are very placid by nature and rarely bite but they will often jump and can be quite flighty so must be handled carefully. In common with many lizards, crested geckos have the ability to shed their tails as a defensive mechanism and this will not regrow if lost.

In common with most arboreal geckos, crested geckos have pads on the ends of their feet which allow them to climb vertical surface, including glass.

Housing

Crested geckos are adapted for climbing and it is preferable to use a vivarium which is taller than it is wide in order that they may exhibit normal behaviour patterns. For a single animal a vivarium no smaller than 60 x 45 x 30 cms (HxWxD) is recommended and if pairs or groups are to be maintained then a larger enclosure will be needed.

Crested geckos can be kept singly, as one male and one or more females, as groups of females or, depending on the size of the enclosure. Two adult males should not be housed in the same vivarium as they are territorial and fighting and possible resultant injury will inevitably occur.

Good ventilation is essential to prevent stagnant conditions which could lead to disease. Housing needs to be secure to prevent escape and free from hazards.

Heating

Crested geckos are best maintained at moderate temperatures and over-heating must be avoided. During the day temperature should be in the region of 23-25°C, dropping at night to 15-18°C. Daytime heating should be supplied using a heat mat, cable or low-wattage heat lamp fitted to a thermostat. This may be turned off at night to give the temperature drop which is highly beneficial to these lizards.

Heating appliances should be placed at one end of the enclosure to create a thermal gradient which will allow the lizard to choose its own preferred temperature. The use of two thermometers, one near the heat source and one at the cool end of the vivarium, is recommended to ensure the correct gradient has been achieved.

Lighting

Crested geckos are crepuscular/nocturnal lizards and UVB lighting is not essential for their long-term maintenance if they are fed the correct diet with an adequate source of dietary calcium and vitamin D3. Exposure to day/night light cycles is, however, very important and the vivarium should be positioned so that it receives natural daylight, without being exposed to direct sunlight.

Some keepers believe that low level UVb lighting may be beneficial and a suitable tube will also render the enclosure more aesthetically pleasing. If such lighting is utilised it should be kept on for 12-14 hours a day in order to provide an appropriate day/night cycle.



Vivarium decor

A variety of substrates can be used, including orchid bark, coco fibre and sphagnum moss. Substrate should be kept slightly damp in order to maintain humidity of around 65-80%. It is essential to provide a variety of climbing and resting facilities, such as logs, vines and branches which may be artificial or natural.

Feeding

The diet should be a mix of live insects dusted with a suitable vitamin/mineral supplement with additional pureed soft fruits, such as mango and banana. Complete prepared diets for crested geckos are also available and can be used in association with, or in place of, livefood & fruit.

Water should be provided in a shallow dish and regular spraying will help to maintain the correct humidity.

Health

A healthy crested gecko should appear alert, with no discharge from eyes, nostrils or mouth. The tail should be well-rounded and the body show little evidence of excess skin-folding indicating that it is underweight.

Health problems may include:

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD): Skeletal deformation caused by lack of calcium or vitamin D. Suitable diet and/or lighting will stop this disease from developing or worsening.

Incomplete skin sloughing: Likely to be caused by lack of humidity. Symptoms should improve with regular spraying

Note: reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Vivarium
- Suitable substrate & cage furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometer(s)
- UVB light (optional)
- Food (frozen mice/rat)
- Water bowl
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

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Animal Welfare

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The Five Animal Welfare Needs:

- **Need for a suitable environment:** *Ensuring your pet has a suitable place to live.*
- **Need for a suitable diet:** *Ensuring your pet's nutritional needs are met and that it has water to drink.*
- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns:** *Making sure your pet has what it needs to behave normally.*
- **Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals:** *Ensuring your pet has appropriate company.*
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Guide to caring for... Corn snakes *Pantherophis guttata*



Corn snakes are one of the most popular pet snakes in the UK. They are of moderate build and size, reaching around 120-180 cms in length when adult. They may be expected to live to twelve to fourteen years but have been known to live until well past twenty. They can reach sexual maturity at 18-24 months, although 30-36 months is more commonplace. Corn snakes are docile, easy to handle and rarely bite.

Corn snakes originated in North America but those offered as pets have been bred in captivity. The wild form is orange with darker orange-to brown markings but the domestication process has produced animals with a high tolerance for handling in a wide range of colour and pattern variations.

Introduction

Corn snakes are usually purchased as young animals and as a broad guideline it is recommended that a minimum age of four to five weeks is appropriate. It is recommended to buy young corn snakes which have an established feeding pattern of at least four meals.

Animals should be alert, with smooth skin, no retention of unshed skin and a firm, full feel to the body. The eyes, nostrils and mouth should be free from discharge.

In the wild corn snakes tend to be solitary animals and it is generally best to keep them separately in captivity. Ordinarily, corn snakes should only be kept together for the purpose of mating.

Housing

The minimum vivarium size should ideally be not less than two-thirds the length of the snake. Hatchlings and juveniles have a tendency to become stressed and may refuse to feed if kept in large enclosures. It is, therefore, best to keep young snakes in small plastic tanks until they are established and feeding well, then increasing the size of the enclosure as the animal grows.

Humidity should generally be kept relatively low but when the snake is preparing to shed it's skin it will require a humid hide area. This can be created by spraying lightly under a hide or providing a box of moistened moss for the snake to access. Vivariums may be of wood or glass construction but it is important that any accommodation used allows for good ventilation.

Cage security is important as small snakes are notorious escape artists. Lids should be well fitting and doors should close without leaving gaps. The use of lockable cage doors is advisory.

Housing needs to be free from hazards, which may cause harm to the snake, and well maintained.

Heating

Heating can be provided in a variety of ways with heat mats being extremely popular. It is very important that less than 33% of the total floor area is covered in order to provide a thermal gradient which allows the animal to choose the optimal temperature. Ceramic heaters or spot bulbs may be used to provide more intense heat but must be guarded to prevent burning. The hot areas in the vivarium should reach around about 30°C, with cooler areas of around 22-24°C. Night temperatures should fall to around 20°C to provide a natural day/night cycle.

It is advised that two thermometers be included in both hot and cooler area of the vivarium

In the wild corn snakes hibernate and a winter cool down period, during which the animal is not offered food, can be undertaken.

Lighting

UV lighting is not essential for corn snakes, but will do no harm, provided sufficient hiding places are present.

Some keepers believe that low level UVb lighting may be beneficial and a suitable tube or bulb will also make the enclosure more aesthetically pleasing. If lighting is utilised it should be switched off at night in order to provide an appropriate day/night cycle.



Vivarium decor

A variety of substrates can be used, aspen bedding, beech chip or even paper. Low branches, rocks and artificial plants will provide environmental enrichment and allow the animals to exhibit natural behaviours. At least one hide box per snake is essential.

Feeding

Corn snakes should be fed on appropriate sized frozen (defrosted) rodents. Hatchlings should be offered pinky mice every 4-6 days whilst adults full-sized mice or small rats every 7-14 days. No food should be offered when the snake is about to shed its skin.

Fresh water presented in a sturdy bowl to prevent spillage should be available at all times.

Health

If cared for properly corn snakes present few health issues.

Things to look out for include:

Respiratory disease: Likely to be caused by insufficient heat or excess humidity, symptoms include fluid or mucus from the nostrils and mouth.

Mites: Snake mites are a common ectoparasite which occasionally build up into an infestation. The snake and/or enclosure should be treated with a reptile mite treatment according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Incomplete skin shedding: Retained skin can be an issue if the snake has not had access to water during shedding.

Note: Reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting sensible hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Vivarium
- Suitable substrate & furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometer(s)
- Light source (optional)
- Food
- Water bowl
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

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Guide to caring for... Royal pythons *Python regius*



Royal pythons are one of the most popular pet snakes in the UK. They are stocky snakes, reaching around 120-130 cm in length when adult, with large females occasionally reaching 170cm. They may be expected to live to twenty years but have been known to live until over thirty. Royal pythons are docile, easy to handle and rarely bite

Royal pythons originated in western Africa but those offered as pets have been bred in captivity. The wild form is dark brown with paler markings but the domestication process has produced animals with a high tolerance for handling in a wide range of colour and pattern variations, including albino, piebald, pastel and spider.

Introduction

Royal pythons are often purchased as young animals and as a broad guideline it is recommended that a minimum age of four to five weeks is appropriate. It is recommended to buy young royal pythons which have an established feeding pattern of at least four meals.

Animals should be alert, with smooth skin, no retention of unshed skin and a firm, full feel to the body. The eyes, nostrils and mouth should be free from discharge.

In the wild royal pythons tend to be solitary animals and it is generally best to keep them separately in captivity. Ordinarily, royal pythons should only be kept together for the purpose of mating.

Housing

The minimum vivarium size should ideally be not less than two-thirds the length of the snake. Hatchlings and juveniles have a tendency to become stressed and may refuse to feed if kept in large enclosures. It is, therefore, best to keep young snakes in small enclosures until they are established and feeding well, then increasing the size of the vivarium as the animal grows.

Humidity should generally be kept relatively low but when the snake is preparing to shed it's skin it will require a humid hide area. This can be created by spraying lightly under a hide or providing a box of moistened moss for the snake to access. Vivariums may be of wood or glass construction but it is important that any accommodation used allows for good ventilation.

Cage security is important as small snakes are notorious escape artists. Lids should be well fitting and doors should close without leaving gaps. The use of lockable cage doors is advisory.

Housing needs to be free from hazards, which may cause harm to the snake, and well maintained.

Heating

Heating can be provided in a variety of ways with heat mats being extremely popular. It is very important that less than 33% of the total floor area is covered in order to provide a thermal gradient which allows the animal to choose the optimal temperature throughout the day. Ceramic heaters or spot bulbs may be used to provide more intense heat but must be guarded to prevent burning. All heating devices should be controlled by a thermostat.

The hot areas in the vivarium should reach around about 30-32°C, with cooler areas of around 24-26°C. Night temperatures can drop a few degrees with no ill-effect and may be beneficial in providing a natural day/night cycle.

It is advised that two thermometers be included in both hot and cooler area of the vivarium.

Lighting

Supplemental lighting is not required for royal pythons as they are by nature largely nocturnal. If the keeper should wish to include in order to better observe the snake within the enclosure, this should be switched off at night in order to provide an appropriate day/night cycle. It is also important that the room in which the enclosure is positioned has an appropriate daylight to night regime.



Vivarium decor

A variety of substrates can be used, aspen bedding, beech chip or even paper. Low branches, rocks and artificial plants will provide environmental enrichment and allow the animals to exhibit natural behaviours. At least one hide box per snake is essential.

Feeding

Royal pythons should be fed on appropriate sized frozen (defrosted) rodents. Hatchlings should be offered fluffy mice every 4-6 days whilst adults full-sized mice or small rats every 7-14 days. No food should be offered when the snake is about to shed its skin.

Fresh water presented in a sturdy bowl to prevent spillage should be available at all times.

Health

If cared for properly royal pythons present few health issues.

Things to look out for include:

Respiratory disease: Likely to be caused by insufficient heat or excess humidity, symptoms include fluid or mucus from the nostrils and mouth.

Mites: Snake mites are a common ectoparasite which occasionally build up into an infestation. The snake and/or enclosure should be treated with a reptile mite treatment according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Incomplete skin shedding: Retained skin can be an issue if the snake has not had access to water during shedding.

Note: reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting basic hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Indoor / outdoor enclosures
- Suitable substrate & furnishings
- Heat source & thermostat
- Thermometer(s)
- UVb light source
- Food & supplements
- Water bowl
- Pet safe disinfectant

Before purchase ensure that:

- You have the time and commitment to look after the animal for its entire life.
- You have the equipment to look after it properly.
- You have considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your pet is injured or unwell.
- You have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil its basic needs.
- You have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after it.

NEVER RELEASE ANIMALS INTO THE WILD

Companion animals must never be released into the wild. It is illegal and, for most species, will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death as they are not native to this country. Any animals that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 requires that all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their animals. If you own, or are responsible for, a reptile or amphibian and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

The Five Animal Welfare Needs:

- **Need for a suitable environment:** *Ensuring your pet has a suitable place to live.*
- **Need for a suitable diet:** *Ensuring your pet's nutritional needs are met and that it has water to drink.*
- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns:** *Making sure your pet has what it needs to behave normally.*
- **Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals:** *Ensuring your pet has appropriate company.*
- **Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury or disease:** *Making sure your pet stays healthy.*

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Guide to caring for... Mediterranean tortoises *Testudo sp.*



Mediterranean tortoises are the most popular pet tortoises in the UK. There are three species: Hermann's (*Testudo hermanni*), spur-thighed (*Testudo graeca*) & marginated (*Testudo marginata*). Requirements in captivity are sufficiently similar to justify including all three in a single care sheet which will refer to them under the collective term Mediterranean tortoises.

Mediterranean tortoises offered as pets have been bred in captivity but are all on Annex A of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (CITES). Owners should ensure that any necessary exemption certification is in place and be aware that there is a requirement for permanent marking via a micro-chip if animals are subject to change of ownership or other commercial activity such as breeding.

Introduction

Mediterranean tortoises have been kept as pets for many years, but are essentially unchanged from their wild form. The climate in the UK is suitable for them during warmer months and these animals are commonly thought of as garden tortoises.

When choosing a tortoise ensure that the eyes are clear and bright and that neither the nose or mouth show any signs of fluid discharge. The tortoise should not be sneezing, wheezing or breathing through the mouth and should have a firm, but smooth shell.

Special consideration needs to be taken to long-term care as tortoises are exceptionally long-lived and their life-span may well exceed that of the owner. Keepers, therefore, need to be aware of the necessity to make provision for their pet if they should become incapacitated or die.

Even though pet tortoises are bred in captivity they are on Annex A of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (CITES) and will require exemption certification and permanent marking via a micro-chip if animals are subject to change of ownership or other commercial activity, such as breeding.

Housing

Mediterranean tortoises ideally need access to both indoor and outdoor space and most owners allow their pets to roam in a garden (or section thereof) where they have access to forage for edible plants.

Indoor accommodation is generally provided by a purpose-built enclosure, normally referred to as a tortoise table, although a spacious vivarium with adequate ventilation may also be utilised. Minimum enclosure size for one adult should be 300cm x 500cm (36" x 48"). Outdoor accommodation should be predator-proof and include a covered enclosure for use in bad weather.

Heating

Mediterranean tortoises in indoor enclosures need temperatures sufficiently high for maximal metabolism, but also require a thermal gradient to allow them to choose a cooler spot. A high quality combined heat and UVb lamp placed at one end of the enclosure should allow the tortoise a basking temperature of 32-35°C, with the other end kept at normal room temperature. The bulb should be turned off at night to provide a day/night differential. In very cold rooms it may be necessary to provide background heating at night using an infra-red ceramic heater.

Lighting

Supplemental UVb lighting is absolutely essential for Mediterranean tortoises which are housed indoors and do not have access to natural sunlight. If separate sources of lighting and heating are used it is important to ensure that lighting addresses both optimal provision of UVb and high intensity visible light in order for the tortoise to properly maintain its day/night rhythm and metabolism.

Bulbs or tubes will need to be replaced every six to twelve months, in accord with to manufacturer's instructions, as UV output significantly reduces with time.

Illumination should be provided on a regime which gives a suitable day/night cycle.



Vivarium decor

A mix of play sand and topsoil is suitable for use in indoor accommodation. Commercial reptile sand and wood chips are also regularly used but can lead to gut impaction if ingested by tortoises. This is a serious health issue to which juvenile animals are particularly susceptible and is commonly (although not exclusively) associated with silica-based sands.

Feeding

Tortoises are herbivores which require a diet rich in fibre but low in protein and fat. Diet should be based around a wide variety of green-leafed vegetables and edible (non-toxic) flowers and leaves. An appropriate calcium and vitamin D3 supplement should be sprinkled on all foods.

Fresh water presented in a sturdy bowl to prevent spillage should be available at all times.

Health

If cared for properly Mediterranean tortoises present few health issues.

Things to look out for include:

Respiratory disease: Likely to be caused by insufficient heat or excess humidity, symptoms include fluid or mucus from the nostrils and mouth, wheezing or sneezing.

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD): Skeletal and shell deformation caused by lack of calcium or vitamin D. Suitable diet and/or lighting will stop this disease from developing or worsening.

Note: reptiles can carry a form of Salmonella which can be transferred to humans. Adopting hygiene precautions, such as washing hands after handling pets, should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.