

East Bay Vivarium

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Tortoises come from desert to tropical and some warmer temperature climates. The species of tortoise and its habitat range will determine the environment you will need to replicate. With proper care, tortoises can live over 100 years in captivity. Some tortoises grow no larger than a grapefruit while others can get larger than a wheelbarrow.

Habitat:

Temperature: Establish a range of temperature from 100°F (hot end) to 75-80°F (cool end). It is important to offer your animal a choice of conditions at all times. Heat should be provided overhead and from below.

Water: Tropical tortoises should be offered a shallow water bowl and be misted once a day. No water should be offered in desert tortoise cages. All baby tortoises should be soaked in very shallow tepid water for about 30 minutes each day. Adults should be soaked about once a week. This applies to tropical and desert tortoises.

Bedding: Screened pine shavings or dry peat moss, mixed with fine-grained sand can be used for tropical tortoises. Tropical tortoises should have moist peat moss.

Cage Decorations: Provide your tortoise with a hide box (a warm dark place for your tortoise to sleep).

Tank Size: Baby tortoises should be kept in a minimum of a 15-gallon tank. When your tortoise grows you will need to provide it with larger tanks. Some adults should be kept outdoors with access to a heated doghouse or shed.

Special Lighting: It is essential to provide your tortoise with a UVB light source. These lights simulate natural sunlight and aid tortoises metabolize key vitamins and minerals. UVB lighting is essential for preventing calcium deficiencies.

Feeding:

Feed Daily: Offer desert tortoise species mostly (95%) dark leafy greens, grasses and legumes. Baby greens and spring mix; dandelion greens, romaine lettuce, alfalfa sprouts, etc. are all favorites among tortoises. Variety is important. Fruits and other occasional foods (primate diet) can be offered in small amounts (5%). For tropical tortoises feed a ratio of 75% leafy greens and 25% fruits. Adults should be fed every other day.

Vitamins: Lightly dust all foods with a 50/50 mixture of calcium supplements and vitamin supplements. These items are an essential part of your dragons' diet. Without them, tortoises may develop vitamin and calcium deficiencies, which are ultimately fatal.

Maintenance:

Cleaning: Spot clean individual messes and uneaten food, replacing with fresh substrate daily. A wide screen fish net is useful for sifting sand. Clean the entire cage bimonthly or when needed.

Handling: Tortoises do not like to be picked up. the best way to interact with your tortoise is to let it walk around on the ground with you outside on a nice day. Make sure it doesn't have access to toxic plants and do not leave it unsupervised unless your yard is very secure. However, do not handle your animal for the first week you own it. Make sure it is eating and well adjusted to its new home.

Problems: The first sign of an unhealthy tortoise is a lack of appetite. First check the cage temperatures and make sure that they are correct. If the environment is set-up properly and problems persist, please call the East Bay Vivarium for assistance.

Further Reading:

