

Mountain View Animal Hospital
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Caring for your pet Turtle

Environment

The Cage

If the weather is warm, Land species can be put in an outdoor enclosure, as long as there is access to shaded areas and places to burrow so they can keep cool. Water turtles can also be housed outside when the water is warm as long as there is a pool and basking areas. An outdoor enclosure should be no less than 5 ft by 8 ft with wire or flashing placed 1 ft below the ground to prevent the turtle from burrowing under the enclosure. The floor should also have a stone base that is covered with soil. The walls of this enclosure should be 30 inches high and bent at an inward angle so that the turtle cannot escape. It is also recommended that the pen be moved periodically to ensure the animal a fresh "pasture", however, if pesticides and or chemicals are used please do not house your pet outside.

Winter housing can be an aquarium for the smaller species or a polyurethaned wood pen kept inside where it is warm. The box should be 1'x1'x 2' for turtles and 3'x3'x3' for tortoises.

Heating

The steady temperature for a turtle or tortoise should be kept between 73-89°. Infra-red lamps can provide sufficient enough heat to keep your pet warm, but make sure it only shines in one corner so that they can escape from the heat when needed. If additional heat is needed you can purchase a heating pad and place it under, NOT IN, the enclosure. Heating is important because as a rule of thumb, the temperature of the room or cage is that of a turtle/tortoises body temp. If the temperature should be too cold then your pet is at risk of becoming ill, the

same if the temperature should be too hot, they are more susceptible to getting diseases, stress out or even die.

Lighting

Proper lighting is essential to raising any reptile. A "Vita-Lite" ® or a simple black light may be used to expose your pet to the proper dose of ultra violet light. If you use a "Vita-Lite" you should expose your turtle to 12 hours a day. Install the light no higher than 4' above the enclosure. If a black light is used do not expose the turtle to more than 30 minutes per day. Make sure that glass and plastic shields are not used because these filter out the ultraviolet light. Bulbs should be changed every 6 months because they lose their efficacy. However natural sunlight is the best choice. Make sure that shade is still available because turtles not only need 12 hours sunlight they need 12 hours of darkness as well.

Humidity and Bathing

Turtles need a humidity level between 50-70%. Swimming pools should be available for water turtles, but an area to dry off should be provided for all turtles to prevent shell rot. For land turtles/tortoises, a large bowl of water should be provided because they will go in (body and all) to submerge themselves and drink, but they do not swim.

Cage Substrate

Water turtles need enough room to swim, rest and bask, so this may require many different areas in your enclosure. The swimming area should be as deep as 3 lengths of the turtle. If tap water is to be used make sure it sits for 48 hours so that the chlorine can evaporate out of it before you introduce your pet. Distilled water is best to use but can be costly. If you have a salt water species a Tbsp of non-iodized salt can be added per gallon of water being used. Water turtles will also need a good filtration system that is non-submersive. Feeding of aquatic turtles should be done in a separate container to eliminate any health problems and they should be rinsed off before being reintroduced to their tank. The aquarium should be cleaned periodically with a dilute chlorox solution and water.

For soft shelled a sandy area deep enough for them to cover themselves to the top of their shell should be provided because these species like to burrow.

Pebbles and small rocks should be avoided because some turtles may try to eat these and become impacted.

Large rocks and logs should be added for basking, sand for burrowing, a large box or non toxic plant species can be added as well for visual security or a place to hide.

Feeding Requirements

Water Turtle

Aquatic turtles only feed in the water. Fish flavored dry cat food can be used as well as Purina trout chow, balanced tropical fish food or turtle food can be fed to adult turtles. Adding live bait fish to the swimming area can serve as a stimulant and as a source of food since adult water turtles are carnivorous. Bait fish are minnows, guppies, and goldfish, earthworms can be added as well. Juvenile turtles are omnivorous, eating vegetable matter and meat. Young turtles can eat the adult food and vegetable matter such as seaweed, spinach, broccoli tops and leaves, mustard greens, grated carrots and carrot tops. The amount of vegetables you feed should equal only 25% of their daily diet. Young turtles should be fed daily and adults should be every other day.

Terrapins (Salt water or Brackish water turtles)

These turtles should be fed a whole food diet consisting of fish, crustaceans, mollusks and insects, or a commercial terrapin diet.

Tortoises

Mainly vegetarians, tortoises eat mostly vegetation with some insects, carrion, and small rodents. The vegetation diet should consist of native grasses, healthy plants, flowers, fruit of cacti, seeds, greens (mustard, collard, beet, turnip) bok choy, nappa cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, green peas and pods, corn, string beans, dandelions, nasturtium flowers and leaves, squash, pumpkin, romaine and butter lettuce, berries, apples, pears, wheat bread, and (soaked) dry dog food.

Reds, greens, oranges and yellows seem to be most appealing to tortoises in their food choices. Tortoises eat every other day and need fresh water available at all times.

Hibernation

Water turtles, and sick or parasitized animals shouldn't hibernate. Turtles which that can hibernate should be prepared by feeding them a diet rich in digestible nutrients (i e melons, figs, fruits, and squashes) one week prior to hibernation. Food and water need to be restricted for 2-3 days prior to hibernation as well. For a turtle to hibernate the ambient temperature needs to 35-40° f. Make sure to do the proper research on your species before you hibernate your pet.

Signs of Illness

Runny nose	Shell lesions
Swollen eyes	Listlessness
Coughing	Lethargy
Gasping	Loss of equilibrium in water
Swelling	Open mouth breathing
Weight loss	Deformed or Soft shell
Loss of appetite	

Your pet turtle should also be seen on an annual basis with a veterinarian who is familiar with reptiles, to keep it healthy.