

Bearded Dragon's Guide to Happiness

Bearded Dragons are one of the most commonly owned reptiles amongst Americans! That is due to their friendly demeanor and their somewhat simple needs, making them a good choice for a first-time reptile owner! These scaly creatures originated in the rocky deserts of Australia. They are what we call Semi arboreal reptiles. That means that they live primarily on the ground, but they enjoy climbing the rocks of the desert! They thrive in the dry and hot climate of Australia. When someone owns a bearded dragon, they must replicate those temperatures and humidity levels! If you don't make sure your enclosure meets the criteria, you put your reptile at risk of getting a respiratory infection or phenomena! When untreated, these illnesses commonly result in innocent reptiles' demise.

Housing:

Most people do not know the difference between a breeder tank and an aquarium! An aquarium has tall sides with a slender bottom, whereas a breeder tank or terrariums have short sides and an expanded base. Breeder tanks are best for a bearded dragon because terrestrial (ground creatures) need more room to walk and dig, and aquariums are best suited for animals such as fish who need more water to swim! When housing a bearded dragon, the minimum size tank is a 40-gallon breeder tank, and they should be in an enclosure alone.

Water:

Although bearded dragons are desert animals, water is still a crucial part of their enclosure! Bearded dragons are not known for their love of swimming, but they do enjoy a nice soak; So providing a water dish that is large enough for your bearded dragon to lay in is a must-have for your enclosure. Water assists with keeping your enclosure's humidity levels and aid your reptile in the shedding process as well as hydrates them. It is a top priority to keep water bowls clean and provide fresh water every day.

Substrate:

When it comes to the substrate, there are many different opinions on which is the best. In this section, we will cover a couple of fan favorite substrates for your enclosures. Some bearded dragon owners never go as far as a bioactive enclosure, many happy and healthy bearded dragons live their entire life on paper towels! Although this method may not be as esthetically pleasing as other options, it is easy to clean; and gives you a clear look at your reptile's bathroom habits! Similar to the paper towels is the reptile carpeting. The reptile carpet is easy to clean. Unlike the paper towels, the reptile carpeting adds a little extra texture and color to your enclosures. Both of these methods are acceptable, although there are concerns that circle these them. Both the carpet and the paper towels hold onto the feces and urates and can breed bacteria if it is not cleaned and maintained regularly! This issue leads to bacterial infections and fungi. The last method is also our preferred method! Bioactive enclosures offer a lot to the animals within it, as well to the reptile owners! (see the bio-active section on our site for details on how to.) If you decide to do a bi-active enclosure, that means you need dirt! The dirt you decide on is of crucial importance! Some think that due to the origin of these desert lizards, they must need sand; that is an untrue statement although it can be a good addition to a lizard's substrate! When the dirt to sand ratio is off; Sand may be problematic and cause eye issues and intestinal problems! Buying a pre-measured substrate blend is the easiest and best choice for those of us who may not know the best ratios of moss sand and coconut husk soil

Temperatures:

Bearded dragons are desert animals, so naturally, they need a drier, hotter enclosure than other reptiles you may have had in the past! Lighting and temperatures are important! They play a large part in the digestion, calcium absorption, and activity level of your beardie! Like all creatures, it is not particularly good to have extreme temperatures with no relief from it. To avoid overheating provide a range of temperatures from the hottest basking place to the other end of the tank where the temperatures are lowest. An appropriate basking temperature should be around 100 degrees F and progressively getting cooler. The lowest temperature should be between 77 and 85 degrees F. In their natural habitat, the temperatures are lower at night. It is acceptable to allow your bearded dragon to go without heat as long as the enclosure does not get below 75 degrees F. Humidity is drier since replicating a desert environment. The ideal range of humidity is between 35-50 percent!

Food:

There are many mistakes early on in owning a reptile. Some can be fixed, reverse, or fatal. The diet of your reptile is crucial; especially in the early stages of life. The first step to a healthy lizard is to feed the lizard healthy things! Knowing what your reptile is (carnivore omnivore or insectivore), and feeding it accordingly. Bearded dragons are insectivores! This means they eat a variety of vegetables and small insects for their protein and hydration. Ideal insects for these guys are, but are not limited to dubia roaches, discoid roaches, super worms, mealworms, hornworms, silkworms, and calcium worms/ black soldier fly larva! As babies, your beardie may not eat his vegetables (although they still should be offered daily) this is a perfectly normal occurrence. As they age and grow Vegetables become more and more appealing to them! Dark leafy greens such as Turnip greens, Mustard greens, kale, and collards are great for them! Like dark greens, other vegetables are important. you want your dragon to have a wide variety of them! We like to use radishes, bell peppers, carrots, zucchini, squash. Although enjoyed fruits should make up a lar percentage of your beardies diet. Strawberries, blueberries, and mangos always seem to be a hit!

Vitamins:

Like humans, vitamins and supplements can help boost our immune system as well as our general heal and the way we feel. Most importantly, the calcium! Calcium is a major part of the growth, bone density, energy and so much more! The use of calcium is important and can and will direct your reptile's chance at life, as well as the quality if they survive! Calcium comes with D3 and without it. D3 is not necessary for your reptile if UVB is provided. With that being said a weekly dose of calcium with D3 in it is not a bad idea!

Lighting

Like all the sections before this one, this is of utmost importance. Lighting may seem like an easy thing to do and accomplish based on the mentality that they are like us, we live indoors with no special lighting so shouldn't they be able to? The answer (with few exclusions as we get into amphibians and specific reptiles) is no! They absolutely need to have proper lighting! UVB is the addition to every enclosure that helps your dragon digest and absorb the calcium, as well as provide a natural energy source to your beardie! The light options are limited. Sadly it's between tube lighting and Mercury-based lighting! The mercury-based light has its pros and cons! The major pro to this style of light is that it provides not only UVA/UVB light also serves as a heating source in your cage! This limits the amount of electricity needed to provide warmth! Tube lighting is the next option. Just as the option before it, it has its pros the long light offers you two options, T5 and T 8. Do not let the numbers confuse you, the T8 is not superior to a T5! When dealing with desert reptiles, we strongly advise you to use the T5 to optimal UVB and calcium absorption! Just as the mercury bulbs, it is recommended for all UVB bulbs to be changed every 6 to 9 months depending on the bulb you choose!

Bearded Dragon Cheat Sheet

Lighting: NEEDS Lighting, UVB, Heat Bulb

Temps: Basking around 100F/ Cool side of temp Low 80's

Vitamins: Calcium Without D3 : 2 times a week/With D3 one time a week

Housing: 40 Gallon Breeder or More

Water: Give them a bowl to soak in

Substrate: Paper towels, reptile carpet, or bio active (see section above for details)

Food: Dubia roaches, super worms, Kale, collards, mango, apple, radish, bell pepper, zucchini, squash

Commonly asked questions

Do they have teeth?

Yes, although known for their friendly demeanor Bearded dragons can bite, and do have teeth.

can they eat meat:

No, Do not feed them fish, or other forms of protein you see others giving their larger breed lizards.

How big should the roaches he is fed be?

As a general rule, do not feed your beardie anything that is bigger than the space between its nose.

Do they need UVB?

Yes, absolutely.

Do they like to climb?

Yes, they do like to climb but make sure what you are providing him as a climbing feature is low enough to the ground, they have a flat sturdy body, and limbs that are meant to climb rocks, not trees.

Do Bearded Dragons make good pets?

Yes, but like all reptiles, they have very specific needs and proper research should be done first!

How big will my beardie get?

Up to 24 inches

Food List: **80 percent of their salads need to be greens**

collard greens

beet greens

mustard greens

turnip greens

alfalfa hay

bok choy

kale

parsley

Swiss chard

Watercress

Clover

Cilantro

Kohlrabi

bell peppers

green beans

escarole

dandelion

Other Veggies/Fruit : **should be about 20 percent of their salads**

various squash

sprouts

cooked sweet potato

parsnips

okra

cucumber

asparagus

mushroom,

carrots

peas

corn

apples

pears

bananas (with skin)

mango

grapes

star fruit

peaches

tomato

guava

kiwis

melons

figs (high in calcium)

apricots

dates

raspberries

strawberries

Fruits may be eaten but are generally mineral-poor so they should be fed sparingly as top dressing. As a treat, flowers such as geraniums, carnations, dandelions, hibiscus, nasturtiums, and roses, may also be offered.