

Reptile Care



Humidity

Humidity is important to prevent dehydration & allow for proper shedding. A hygrometer (% humidity reader) should be in each cage. Check the recommended humidity for your species.

Tropical species

- Daily misting with a spray bottle of cage walls, plants, and your pet will keep the humidity level high. You can also use automatic misters or place moist sphagnum moss inside to raise humidity.
- Regular soaking is very important for many tropical species. Use lukewarm water in a designated container and be sure not to make the water deeper than the pet's head. A 20 minute soak 1-2 times weekly is often sufficient, depending on the needs of the species.
- Chameleons require very specialized drip systems and humidity levels to survive.

Desert species

- Too much moisture can cause skin disease and fungal infection, so daily soaking and misting are not generally advised. Warm water soaks 1-2 times weekly will help ensure their hydration.
- You may keep a shallow water dish in the tank for hydration or mist the tank sides as needed.

Diet

Commercial reptile chows are unstandardized & do not provide good nutrition. We recommend supplementing diets with Calcium only (Vit. D & phosphorous free) supplements every 1-2 days & a multivitamin supplement 1-2 times weekly.

Carnivores

- If you are feeding rodents make sure that the purchased prey have been properly fed on Purina or Mazuri brand lab chow not a seed mix. Some retailers carry frozen rodents that are raised this way by a national producer.
- Feed dead prey instead of live to avoid problems with prey-associated wounds and aid with administering medications to your pet.

Diet (continued)

Insectivores

- Do not rely on one kind of prey. Vary prey between crickets, zooworms, wax worms, mealworms, etc. depending on your pet's size & age.
- Always "gut load" your insects for at least 72 hours prior to feeding them to your reptile. Use potatoes, apples, fish flakes, vegetables, dog chow, NOT "insect gels" and commercial cricket foods which do not provide proper nutrition.

Herbivores

- Feed vegetables high in calcium (collards, kale, mustard greens, baby spinach) varying daily to give a well rounded diet. Iceberg lettuce has little nutritional value & is not recommended.

Veterinary Care

Reptiles are notorious for masking signs of illness for long periods of time. Please do not wait to seek help until your pet is very sick as this can make diagnosis & treatment more difficult.

Preventative Medicine

- Annual exams
- Annual Bloodwork to evaluate organ function and to see if their diet is adequate.
- Fecal samples

Common Disorders

- Metabolic bone disease
- Renal disease and gout
- Mineral imbalance
- Respiratory disease
- Wounds from prey or heat source
- Impaction
- Egg binding
- Shell rot
- Shed disorders

Salmonella

- Water turtles and Iguanas can be carriers of Salmonella, which can cause serious, even fatal infections in humans.
- Please practice thorough handwashing after handling reptiles and before eating & do not let your reptile roam freely in the house as this can contaminate surfaces with this bacteria.

There many things to consider when taking on a reptile as a pet. At Oceanside Animal Hospital, we strive to address all of your questions & concerns and provide you with the information you need to provide a safe, healthy home environment for your pet.

This pamphlet contains information about:

- Wild vs Captive?
- Housing & Substrate
- Cleaning
- Temperature
- Lighting
- Humidity
- Diet
- Veterinary Care
- Salmonella



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Wild Caught or Captive Raised?

Wild caught reptiles are taken from their natural habitat, depleting wild populations, and are shipped in large numbers which can lead to stress-induced illness or parasite infections in these animals. Buying wild caught reptiles supports potentially unethical or inhumane practices suppliers use to obtain and sell these animals and encourages them to continue their practices. For these & many other reasons, **we recommend that you purchase from reputable breeders and pet shops captive raised animals**, which are bred in captivity so as not to deplete wild populations. These animals are already adapted to living in captivity and are thus more likely to eat the food you offer and to allow you to handle them.

Housing & Substrate

At Oceanside Animal Hospital, we recommend:

- Housing all of your reptiles individually, as many reptiles will kill their cage mate.
- Using glass aquaria, fiberglass, or reptile mesh caging (NOT wood), which have solid surfaces that can be thoroughly cleaned.
- Taking care to prevent your reptile from damaging himself on the caging (especially water dragons) by lining the bottom half of the sides of your cage with newspaper or decorative scenes to prevent your reptile from seeing outside the cage.
- Substrate materials like Newspaper, Paper Towels or plastic Astroturf. We strongly advise against using any particulate substrates or sand due to dust causing respiratory disease and possible impaction from ingestion.
- Changing the substrate completely on a weekly basis to avoid build-up of bacteria, mold, and parasites.

Cleaning

- The enclosure should be cleaned weekly by removing all furniture (logs, bowls, etc) & substrate, cleaning the cage & furniture, rinsing with water and drying thoroughly before adding new substrate and replacing your pet. (This is a great time to soak tropical species.)
- The best cleaning solutions are either a dilute bleach or chlorhexidine/nolvasan solution. Allow 5-10 minutes of contact time before rinsing thoroughly after each cleaning.
- Daily spot cleaning (removal of any feces or urates) is also recommended. If using a scoop, use a separate scoop for each cage or wash the scoop before cleaning out the next.

Temperature

Every reptile species has different temperature requirements depending on their natural habitat. It is very important to keep your pet at their optimum temperature because their bodies are designed to work best within a specific temperature range. The general principles of heating your reptile cage are as follows:

- **Temperature gradient:** there should be a warm end and a cool end of the cage so that the reptile can move around the cage to regulate their body temperature as needed.
- **Two thermometers per cage** (one at each end) are strongly recommended so that you can monitor the temperature range in the enclosure.
- **Nighttime temperature gradient:** As in nature, the cage temperature should be lower at night than during the day. In general a 10-15 degree lower temperature at night is ideal, but to be sure, check the particular needs of your species.
- **Use a heat lamp.** The wattage for the heat lamp will depend on cage size. **Under tank heaters** are needed if the heat lamp cannot get your cage up to the desired temperature.

Temperature *(continued)*

- Never use in-cage sources of heat, like hot rocks. Reptiles do not possess the same types of nerve sensation on their skin as mammals and they will sit on these heat sources until they are severely burned. It is best to use heat sources like the above tank heat lamp, with which the reptile cannot come into direct contact.

Lighting

Full spectrum UV-B lighting is absolutely essential for the health of most reptiles. In nature, reptiles bask in the sun to regulate their temperature and absorb ultraviolet (UV) light from sunlight. When absorbed into the body, UV light allows the conversion of Vitamin D to Vitamin D3, which is essential for calcium absorption in the intestines. Without proper absorption of calcium a reptile can develop weak bones, kidney failure, & a poor immune system. For this reason it is imperative to supply your reptile with UV light daily by exposing them to the sun or a full spectrum UV-B light source. Guidelines are:

- **A full-spectrum UV light should be used during the day & may be turned off at night**. Glass filters & deflects UV from the sun so light through a window is not adequate.
- Change the bulb every 6 months. UV spectrum of the light can fade even if the light is still on.
- In warmer weather it is a great idea to take your reptile outside for supervised times. Studies have shown that 20 minutes of direct sunlight can provide more benefit than a whole day of most artificial UV lighting.
- Position the bulb to be no more than 18 inches (preferably more like 10 inches) away from the animal to receive the full effects of the UV light.
- A UV light with both UV-A and UV-B spectrum will help to stimulate your reptiles appetite and attitude. Zoo Med brand seems to work well.