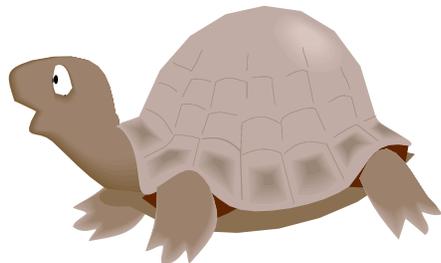


Box turtles and small tortoises are becoming very popular pets, but proper care and nutrition needs to be provided. Most medical conditions of these pets result from malnutrition or inadequate environments.



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## Care and Husbandry of Box Turtles and Tortoises.



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## Diet

BOX TURTLES are omnivores (eat a wide variety of vegetables and proteins), they eat:

·Up to 50% protein- earthworms, crickets, tuna, dog/cat food.

·About 50-75% vegetables- leafy greens, carrots, sweet potatoes, fleshy vegetables and fruits

Juvenile box turtles may only eat live food initially, but will convert to partial vegetables as they grow. Semi-hibernating box turtles may only eat protein for a couple of months during the winter, but will resume eating vegetation as the season changes. Feed and clean daily to prevent contamination.

TORTOISES are vegetarians (eat only vegetables). Most tortoises are made to digest coarse greens as their main diet. Feed turnip tops, collard, mustard or dandelion greens as the main diet. Fleshy vegetables such as carrots, sweet potatoes, squash and fruits can be given a few times weekly. Larger tortoises do best when fed greens, hay and guinea pig pellets with fruits and fleshy vegetables as treats.

## Hibernation

It is only recommended that experienced turtle and tortoise owners try to hibernate their reptiles.

## Vitamin and mineral supplements

It can be difficult to get box turtles and tortoises to eat a well balanced diet, so supplements are usually necessary. Supplements should contain calcium, vitamins A, E and D3 and can be dusted on the food daily for juveniles and twice weekly for adults.

## Ultraviolet light

All turtles require 12-14 hours of artificial sunlight (UV-B rays). It is essential for proper calcium metabolism and normal shell growth. UV-B causes their skin to make vitamin D3, which allows them to take up calcium from what they eat. Juveniles will develop shell curling, beak deformities or other abnormalities if deprived of proper ultraviolet light.

## Humidity

Box turtles live at the forest edge and require high humidity (30-60%). Tortoises are desert animals that require low humidity.

## Bathing and drinking

Box turtles enjoy fresh water for drinking and will climb in for a soak. Tortoises require less water but fresh water should be provided daily.

## Heat

Box turtles require moderate heat and high humidity, while tortoises require high heat and low humidity. Box turtles need a heat lamp for 12 hours during the day. Their basking area should be 85-90°F and the rest of the cage should reach 75-80°F for at least 12 hours during the day. Room temperature is fine at night. Tortoises' basking area needs to be 92-99°F and the rest of the cage above 80°F for 12 hours, and above 70°F at night. Heat lamps and under tank strips will need to be adjusted to insure proper temperatures.

## Visual security

Box turtles and tortoises need a place to hide. Use boxes, logs, plants and bedding to provide a secure place to hide and sleep.

## Husbandry

Bacterial and fungal infections usually result from malnutrition or poor cage hygiene. Box turtles like bark or peat to bury themselves in, but the humid environment can cause bacterial build up if not cleaned enough. Tortoises are often kept on calcium sand or guinea pig pellets, but it will need to be sifted daily and dumped at least once or twice each month. Although they may not like it as much, artificial turf is sometimes more practical.