

Bearded dragon husbandry and care

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Bearded dragons are probably the most popular pet lizard. They are medium sized, relatively hardy and easy to care, and can live up to 8-10 years with proper conditions. Wild bearded dragons live in Australian deserts and arid areas with plenty of rocks or branches to climb. Besides the wild type color morph, there are several color mutations found in captivity.

Housing

Bearded dragons should be kept on their own as they are not social animals. To keep a happy and healthy beardie you will be needing the following:

- Large glass horizontal **vivarium** (minimum for an adult: 100 x 45 x 45 cm)
- Ventilation – the vivarium should have some screens to allow air movement.
- **Basking bulb** – provides both light and heat; a basking area (33-41°C) should be created on one side of the vivarium, and a colder area on the opposite side (above 22-27 °C). A slight night temperature is ok but never below 18 °C.
- **UV-B bulb** – a bulb with 10% UV-B output (280-315 nm) should be used directed over the basking spot. These need to be directly over the animal (without any glass, plastic or mesh) and replaced every 12-18 months.
- Heat mats – might be required to guarantee that temperature stays within the ideal range.
- Thermometer/hygrometer - to check if temperature/humidity are within the ideal range.
- **Substrate** – safe options are paper towels or artificial lawn carpets. Adults can be kept on a 50:50 mix of sand and soil or bark but there is some risk of ingestion and intestinal blockage.
- **Decoration** – branches or rocks for climbing and a hiding place should be provided.

Veterinary care

- Yearly health check
- Yearly fecal testing for internal parasites

Brumation – Bearded dragons don't hibernate but when conditions are not ideal in the wild they can go through this process of lethargy. It's something that shouldn't happen in captive beardies and always indicate some illness.

Diet

Bearded dragons eat mostly insects when young but become omnivorous (eating 25% insects and 75% vegetables) as they grow older. Young beardies should be fed twice daily, while adults every 1-2 days. Food items include:

- **Insects** – appropriate size crickets, locusts, cockroaches, mealworms or morio worms. Occasionally, wax worms can be given as treat. All prey insects should be gut-loaded and dusted with calcium before being offered to your beardie.
- **Dark leafy greens** – items include kale, cabbage, spring greens, turnip and collared greens, dandelion leaves.
- **Other vegetables** – pumpkin, peppers, courgette, shredded carrot, dandelion and hibiscus flowers.
- **Fruit** – very small daily amounts of melon, papaya, mango, kiwi or berries.
- **Calcium** supplement – offered with any meal.
- Vitamins – a multivitamin supplement can be offered once a week.
- **Water** – despite being a desert species, beardies should have a water bowl always available and the vivarium misted daily. It's also a good idea to give them a regular luke-warm water bath.

Signs of disease

Although quite hardy, beardies can become ill sometimes. Reptiles are good at hiding signs of disease but any beardie that's refusing to eat, is more quiet, having trouble breathing, passing abnormal stool or constipated should be examined.

Common disease problems include:

- Internal parasites
- Retained shed
- Retained eggs or follicles in females
- Skin growths and lumps