



# Husbandry and care of tortoises

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Tortoises are popular pets that can have very long lifespans (sometimes up to 60-70 years!) with proper care. Several species are commonly kept:

- Mediterranean, Greek and Horsfield's tortoises – found in southern Europe, North Africa and middle East. These are small to middle sized species that can hibernate in the wild;
- Sulcata and leopard tortoise – large to very large species from Africa's savannahs;
- Red-footed tortoise – large species from South America tropical forests.

## Diet

All tortoises are mainly herbivorous, with some differences between species. Young tortoises should be fed daily, while adults every 2-3 days. The basic diet should include:

- Dark leafy greens – as varied as possible, including cabbage, spring greens, collard and turnip greens, as well as wild plants like clover, plantain and dandelions. Don't offer too much kale or spinach as they bind to calcium, preventing it from being absorbed from food.
- Hay – specially important for leopard and sulcata tortoises, and should be the main item on their diets.
- Other vegetables – pumpkin, grated carrot, tomatoes, peppers, etc. can be offered in small amounts to red-footed tortoises.
- Fruit – melon, papaya, berries, kiwi, mango, can also be offered in small amounts to red-footed.
- Treats – herbs like coriander and dill, flowers (hibiscus, dandelions, nasturtium).
- Animal protein – red-footed should be offered some worms, thawed pinkies or low fat dog food, every couple weeks.
- Calcium supplement – offered with every meal.
- Fresh water available at all times. Tortoises also benefit on having a luke-warm bath regularly to stay hydrated

## Housing

Tortoises are typically kept in tortoise tables, that should have an area as large as possible, as these are quite active animals. All species require the following to be healthy:

- Heat source – best option is a heat lump that provides light and heat from above. A heat gradient should be created with a basking area (30-35°C) in one side of the enclosure, and a colder area (25-26°C) on the opposite end. Temperature requirements vary with species. A slight temperature drop during the night is ok but shouldn't go below 24°C.
- UV-B bulb – should be directed over the basking spot, without any glass, plastic or mesh between them and the animals (otherwise the UV-B radiation is lost). Bulbs need to be replaced every 12-18 months.
- Adequate substrate – soil, peat or artificial grass. Sand or bark should be avoided as can be ingested by the animals

European species can be kept outdoors during summer months. The larger leopard and sulcata tortoises, when adults, require very large enclosures (sometimes a whole room).

In warmer countries tortoises can be kept outdoors year-round but this is not advised with UK climate.

## Veterinary care

- Yearly health check
- Yearly fecal testing for internal parasites
- Pre-hibernation health check for some Mediterranean, Greek and Horsfield's tortoises.
- Beak/nail trims – in some individuals

**Signs of illness** – Some common signs of disease include: refusing to eat, closed eyes, open mouth breathing, constipation, straining, unwilling to move.

## Should my tortoise hibernate?

Only a few species are adapted to hibernate – Mediterranean, Greek and Horsfield. Hibernation is not a risk-free process and can cause some health problems to young or weak animals. It is important that any tortoise has a health check before going through hibernation; this allows to detect any health issue, discuss risks and benefits and detail all the steps for your pet tortoise to have a safe hibernation.

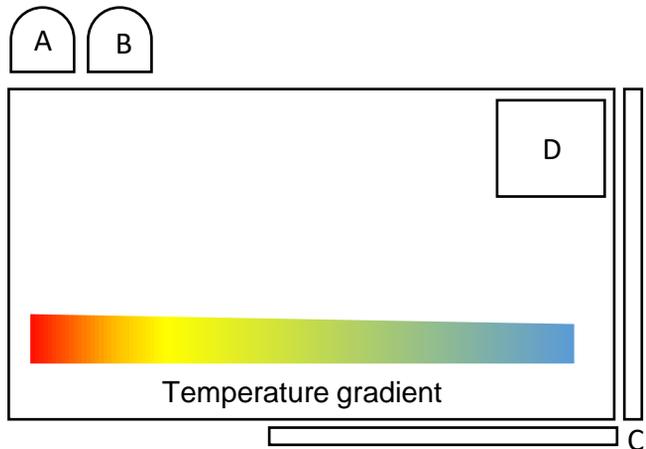
# Your pet reptile ideal enclosure

## 1. General type of enclosure:

- Aquarium  
  Aqua-terrarium/paludarium  
  Tortoise table  
  Vertical vivarium  
  Horizontal vivarium  
 Other type: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Equipment needed:

- Heat bulb (A)  
 UV-B bulb (B) – UV-B output: \_\_\_\_ %  
 Heat mat (side/underneath vivarium) (C)  
 Misting/fogger (D)  
 Thermometer  
 Hygrometer  
 Ventilation (side/top of vivarium)  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## 3. Environment conditions

- Temperature: Basking spot = \_\_\_\_ °C  
 Cold end = \_\_\_\_ °C  
 Night time = \_\_\_\_ °C  
 Humidity = \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ %  
 Day/night light cycle = \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ hours  
 Hibernation: \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Environment enrichment

- Substrate:  soil  
 sand  
 peat/moss  
 bark  
 paper towels  
 artificial lawn  
 bare  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Decoration:  branches/vines  
 rocks  
 live/artificial plants  
 hiding places  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Water:  bowl  
 tub  
 misting/fogger machine  
 dripping system  
 Spraying – frequency: \_\_\_\_ x day

## 5. Diet

- Supplements:  Calcium: \_\_\_\_  
 Vitamins: \_\_\_\_  
 Gut-load prey: \_\_\_\_  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Feeding frequency: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Water:  bowl/tub  
 luke-warm bath  
 spray/mist  
 dripping system

### Herbivore

- Hay  
 Dark leafy greens  
 Fruit  
 Other vegetables:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other items:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Carnivore

- mice (thawed)  
 rat (thawed)  
 day chicks  
 fish (thawed)  
 Other items:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Insectivore

- crickets  
 mealworms  
 locusts  
 morio worms  
 cockroaches  
 earthworms  
 Other items:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Omnivore

- Vegetables: \_\_\_\_ %  
 Insects: \_\_\_\_ %  
 Other items:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_