



Green Iguana Care

A comprehensive guide on caring for your green iguana

**Green iguanas do not make the best pets and we highly recommend against obtaining a juvenile or adult. Green iguanas are complicated and high maintenance animals that are only suitable for expert level caretakers. If you have rescued an iguana or otherwise found yourself in the possession of one this care sheet should prove helpful.*

Description

Average adult size is 4-6 feet total length, 13-18 inches snout-to-vent. The green iguana is usually but not always green. There are many natural color variations as well as purposefully bred morphs. All remaining information here pertains to the “green” iguana (*Iguana iguana*), not the other genera and species of iguanas.

Enclosure

Since wild iguanas reside in trees and only rarely spend time on the ground to forage or dig nests, a tall cage will make them feel as much at home as



possible. Recommended minimum dimensions for an adult iguana are 4 feet x 5 feet x 6 feet making sure the enclosure is taller rather than wider. The enclosure should have stout climbing branches in addition to ladders and/or shelves to allow them to move from place to place. Newspaper, tile, or thin felt indoor-outdoor carpet make the best substrate or floor cover. Never use loose substrate such as wood chips, shavings, mulch and sand. If a loose substrate is used there is a high risk of intestinal impaction if any is ingested.



Humidity

Iguanas require high humidity to mimic their natural environment. Ideal humidity level is 70-80% and not falling below 65%. If an increase in humidity is needed, it is a better option to mist by hand, use an automatic mister, increase standing water surface area, or use a humidifier in the room rather than utilizing a moisture retaining substrate. A hygrometer is required to properly measure humidity levels.

Heating and Lighting

It is important for iguanas to have room to move around their enclosure so they can properly thermoregulate - moving from warmer to colder areas as needed. In a cage or in a free-roaming area the basking spot should be located over a high perch and should have a temperature of between 95°-100° F and exposure to significant UVB light. An infrared temperature gun is the best way to measure basking temperatures.

UV Light: To receive proper UV exposure ensure the bulb you are using is not blocked by glass, plastic, or a tight mesh that will filter out the UV. Be sure to select a high-quality UVB source. Not all fluorescent or “full spectrum” tubes sold in pet stores are high quality enough for iguanas. The Zoo Med Repti-Sun 10.0 tube is among the most trustworthy and comes in a variety of lengths to fit various cages and basking sites. Your iguana needs to have a basking spot within 10-18 inches of a fluorescent tube bulb. These bulbs need to be replaced every 6 months. Even though they will still output light after 6 months, they will not produce a sufficient amount of UV light. We do not recommend using compact (spiral) fluorescent bulbs as they can cause eye issues and do not disperse UVB well.

Another type of UV source is the mercury vapor bulb such as Mega-Ray or PowerSun bulbs. These bulbs provide both UV light as well as heat. When using a mercury vapor bulb the basking spot should be at least 12 inches away from the bulb for safety. Different brands of mercury vapor bulbs have different distances in which UV light successfully penetrates. Refer to your specific bulb brand when setting up a basking spot. In general their UV light penetrates further than that of fluorescent tube bulbs. As with fluorescent tube bulbs, mercury vapor bulbs need to be replaced every 6 months due to diminished UV output. The exception is for Mega-Ray bulbs which only need to be changed every 12 months.

The easiest way to maintain the necessary 12 hour night-day cycle is to put your UVB light and any other light producing bulbs on a timer.

Heat:

There are many options of reptile basking lights sold for day time use. Non-reptile-specific bulbs such as halogen flood lights can also be utilized. As mentioned above, even some UV lights (mercury vapor bulbs) act as a heat source. Ceramic heat emitters (CHEs) give off heat but no light and come in a variety of wattages for different sized spaces. If the temperature in your

house drops to below the 70°s F at night, you should use a CHE to help raise temperatures. The advantage of CHEs over ordinary basking lamps is that there is no light to disturb the iguana's sleep if it is left on.

Feeding and Water

In the wild, iguanas are typically found in the upper parts of trees, where they eat mostly leaves and capture the UVB rays of the sun that aid in their digestion and bone growth. For this reason they are called folivores rather than carnivores, omnivores or herbivores. Iguanas should be offered a variety of leafy greens, vegetables, and fruits. Leafy greens should make up the bulk of their diet (70%), followed by vegetables (20%). Feed fruit sparingly (10%). Iguanas have varying tastes and may prefer different foods. Mix and match foods to find out your iguana's favorites! Feeding a variety of produce is important because it will help provide varied nutrients and prevent your iguana from becoming habituated to the same food items. High quality choices for greens include collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, dandelion greens, escarole, and endive. **Stay away from spinach, chard, and kale; they have negative impact on calcium uptake***. Suitable vegetables are carrots, bell peppers, zucchini, squash, beets, yams, parsnips, and peas. Good fruits to feed are apples, grapes, strawberries, papaya, cantaloupe, bananas, persimmons, cherries, berries, or kiwi. This is not a complete list of safe and suitable produce! If trying a new item, please check to verify it is okay to feed**. Offer fresh produce to your iguana daily.

** Some foods bind calcium and this impacts healthy calcium absorption. For a more detailed list of foods that affect calcium uptake see http://www.anapsid.org/iguana/cal_ox.html*

*** <http://www.greenigsociety.org/foodchart.htm>*

Although no commercial iguana diet is recommended as a staple food, Rep-Cal brand pelleted iguana food has good nutrition and most importantly can be soaked and sprinkled on top of the iguana salad to provide hydration along with the moisture provided from fresh produce. A water pan for soaking, along with frequent baths or showers also assists with hydration. Keeping your

iguana in properly humid environment is also beneficial.



Finally, it is important to supplement iguana salad with a pinch of powdered reptile multi-vitamins and calcium with D3 once or twice a week. If your iguana is receiving natural sunlight, using calcium without D3 is preferred. These supplements help prevent health conditions such as metabolic bone disease (MBD).

Free-roaming

In an appropriate residence and household it may be possible to set up a “free-roaming” arrangement for an iguana. Free-roaming means that the iguana’s base of operations is not an enclosure but rather a more open environment such as shelves attached to a wall or a small bedroom or closet of its own. This presumes that the iguana is tame and not a hazard to humans or other pets and that other pets are not a danger to the iguana. Also, whether in an enclosure or free-roaming, there are some heating and lighting essentials that, if not strictly followed, will cause the iguana to become ill.

Maintenance

Spot clean your iguana's enclosure daily and change out water. For spot cleaning, mild cleaning solutions such as soap and water or vinegar and water are great. For disinfecting, Chlorhexidine is a safe, yet effective, disinfectant that can be used regularly.

Bathing your iguana can assist with hydration, shedding, defecation, and cleaning fecal matter off of its body. Iguanas should be bathed or showered at least once a week, but can be done daily if desired.

To maneuver, iguanas have long, sharp claws that must be retained at least at some short length, but must be kept clipped to avoid inflicting serious scratches on the owner.

Safety

Iguanas are large, powerful animals that have the potential to be aggressive and dangerous. Be careful when handling your iguana and be aware of the damage they can do. Take care to not put your iguana in situations where it may injure yourself, others, or other animals. They have a long tail that can quickly and painfully whip as a defense. Their jaws are also extremely powerful and contain many sharp teeth than can easily bite off a human finger. Even with regular trimming, claws can be used in self defense to inflict injury as well. The safest way to hold an iguana is with its back close to your chest and jaws and claws facing outward.

Health - Eggs

The pet trade is already suffering from too many iguanas, so we never advocate for breeding. But, owners of female iguanas should be aware of concerns regarding eggs. Adult (two years or older) female iguanas can be expected to produce about 50 eggs a year whether or not they have mated. Sometimes these eggs are resorbed, but if you observe your female iguana growing wider but not eating, or digging and scratching in the cage or house, you should suspect that she is gravid (making eggs) and create a nest box. Severe complications can arise

if eggs are not laid. The good way to avoid these situations is to have your female iguana spayed by a vet that specializes in reptiles.

