



Indoor Aquatic Turtle Care

A comprehensive guide on caring for your indoor aquatic turtle

Enclosure

Turtles do well in large aquariums. You want to think about how large your turtle will be when it is fully grown. You may have to use multiple aquariums throughout your turtle's life! The rule of thumb for an aquatic turtle is to have *10 gallons of water for every inch in length* of the turtle's shell. So, if you have a 10-inch turtle, you would want to house it in a 100-gallon aquarium at minimum.



Turtles need to spend some time out of the water to bask. So, when you are setting up your aquarium make sure you do not fill it up all of the way with water. There are plenty of ways to create a basking platform: a large rock, drift wood, etc. You can also purchase already made platforms like the "Turtle Dock" or the "Turtle Topper." If you are creative, you can even make your very own! Just remember: it is imperative for a turtle to come *completely out of the water* on occasion for the health of its skin.

You also want to make sure that you have an aquarium stand that can support the weight of the water in your aquarium. Otherwise, you may just end up with a very wet floor should it fail.

Filtration, Heating, and Lighting

Unlike many other reptiles, aquatic turtles are extremely high maintenance. They require a filter in their aquarium. There are plenty of filter options out there but you want to get a filter that has 5-6 times gallons per hour (gph) output than the total water the aquarium holds. A 20-gallon aquarium needs to have a minimum 100 gph. However, even with a filter, *weekly water*

changes are still required. 10-20% water changes per week are necessary. This step is very important in helping remove unwanted contaminants such as ammonia.

The best heating source is a heat bulb. You do not want to use in-water heaters (such as used for tropical fish). Turtles tend to break those very easily and can electrocute themselves. Good options for heat bulbs include ceramic heat emitters, incandescent light bulbs, or reptile specific bulbs sold at pet stores.

Apart from the heat light bulb, you will need to provide UVB lighting. This promotes strong shell and bone growth for the turtle. You must replace the UVB bulb every 6 months. Although the bulb will still produce light after 6 months, it will no longer output adequate UVB.

Nutrition

Aquatic turtles are largely carnivorous but will eat plants as they mature. Reptomin Food Sticks and trout chow are a great source of nutrition for them; either can serve as up to 50% of the diet. Dandelion, kale, mustard, collard greens, and romaine are easily available at your local grocery store and are an inexpensive source of greens. Do not be surprised if your turtle doesn't take a liking to them when first offered. Eventually, with time, they will usually eat the produce.

Freshwater fishes such as minnows and shiners are the best source of calcium (and other valuable nutrients) for turtles. You will be able to find these at your local bait shop or pet store. *Offer fish at least once weekly*, but use goldfish sparingly because they can cause severe damage to the turtle's liver and kidney. This is due to goldfish being high in Vitamin A, of which an overdose can be unhealthy. Other important regular food items include earthworms, canned snails, fresh or freeze-dried shrimp, frozen shrimp (thaw before feeding), and krill. Crickets, mealworms, waxworms, and other insects may be offered on occasion.

Maintenance

Maintenance can be broken into three categories: daily, weekly, and monthly.

Daily: Feed turtle daily and check on the general health of the turtle.

Weekly: Remove waste and any uneaten food. Perform a 10-20% water change, and scrub the glass to remove any unsightly algae.

Monthly: Do a 50% water change to the aquarium. Perform filter maintenance (i.e., replace filter cartridge, replace carbon, rinse pre-filter, etc.).

When adding new water to the system at any time, make sure you *dechlorinate the water*. This will remove chlorine and chloramines from the tap water. This can easily be done by adding a liquid additive to your water such as Zoo Med's "ReptiSafe". When doing water changes, treat new water *before* adding to the aquarium. This is valuable because you have good bacteria that live in your filter that help break down turtle waste.