



# Outdoor Box Turtle

A comprehensive guide on caring for your box turtle kept outdoors

## Enclosure

Box turtles typically reach 4-6 inches in length and will continue to grow throughout their lives (although their growth rate slows when they reach their mid-teens). These turtles are long-lived and can reach over 50 years of age with proper care. Box turtles can be found from the temperate forest of North Eastern America to the deserts of Southern America and Mexico. They can be found in all types of habitats. Box turtles do best when kept in **outdoor enclosures** with a minimum of 24-inch high walls from the ground up to prevent escape. Box turtles are excellent climbers and escape artists! Do not put hides or other items near walls as those can assist in box turtles escaping. Make sure the walls are smooth, without footholds, to prevent escape. In addition, box turtles are excellent diggers! Therefore, walls will need to be built into the ground, at a depth of at least 12-inches.



The minimum sized outdoor enclosure for a single box turtle is 4 ft by 4 ft. If you will be housing more than one turtle per enclosure, increase size.

An appropriate outdoor enclosure will incorporate sunny spots and shady spots for the box turtle to reside. This allows them to warm up and cool down at their leisure. Plants are great to add to outdoor enclosures, but make sure that they are non-toxic plants for reptiles; box turtles are omnivores and may attempt to eat the plants. Make sure that any plants used provide shade and are ones that turtles can go underneath for cover.

When creating an outdoor box turtle enclosure the best way to make an appropriate layout is to remove grass from an area of about 20% of the enclosure to create a section of bare ground. If your lawn and soil is free from fertilizers and pesticides this is safe to do. The other 80% of the enclosure can be left as grass with other plants added.

Small to large flat rocks should be added to the enclosure, as box turtles will use them to keep their long nails trimmed. Logs or other natural wood is great to add as it helps retain humidity in the enclosure and can be a natural source of insects.

## Temperatures

Box turtles can handle a wide range of temperatures. Unless you want to avoid winter brumation, you will not need to bring your box turtles indoors. Ensure that your turtles are able to burrow down into their substrate to escape extreme temperatures.

## Co-habitation

In general, box turtles are not a social animal. They usually only come together only to reproduce. However, box turtles can generally be housed with each other, including different species and sub-species of box turtles with success. If you do this, be aware that they may mate. Keep co-habitation for outdoors only.



Best solution is to always offer them a wide variety of insects, including crickets, mealworms, superworms, and earthworms. Juveniles can be fed the same diet, juveniles should be given a diet of 10% protein. As box turtles age, their diet will change to include more protein. Protein offered should be increased accordingly. Adult box turtles should consume 10% produce and 30% protein.

Also offer a variety of produce options. Good produce options include dandelion greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, and collard greens. **Stay away from spinach and kale; they have oxalates.** Additional vegetables that can be fed are: carrots, bell peppers, and peas. Apart from insects and vegetables, fruits should make up 5% of their diet. Healthy fruit are: apples, grapes, blueberries, papaya, and berries.

These foods listed above are some suggestions of common foods fed out – they are not the only ones! Mix and match to see what your box turtle enjoys. Be aware that there are also plenty of commercial pellet foods available that can be offered with produce and protein to provide a well balanced meal.

Hatchling and juvenile box turtles should be fed every day and adults should be fed at least every other day.

It is necessary to sprinkle calcium powder with D3 on either insects or produce before feeding to your box turtle. This is an important supplemental requirement. Calcium powder on produce may cause your box turtle to dislike their produce. If this is the case, switching to powdering insects is often helpful. In addition to using a calcium supplement, providing a cuttlebone can also be a good source of calcium if your box turtle is interested.

## Water

Always give your box turtle access to water. A large, shallow saucer pan or water dish with approximately 2 inches of water for adults (less for younger turtles) will allow the turtle to soak and drink water in its enclosure. Water needs to be changed daily as they often drag debris into water and defecate in there. This is to prevent bacteria accumulation or unwanted harmful build up to occur in the bowl that could cause illness. Fruits and vegetables also provide hydration for box turtles.



## Predation

If you live in an area where your yard is frequented by predators such as raccoons, skunks, and rats you will need to take extra precautions. One option is to make a lid for your enclosure out of chicken wire or hardware cloth. Increasing the height of your walls might also help. Depending upon your individual situation there are many creative solutions that can help alleviate any predator issues. Think outside the box! It is also important to protect turtles from your other pets, especially dogs. It only take one unattended moment for something to go wrong.

## Box Turtle Maintenance

Spot clean the enclosure everyday focusing on removing uneaten food. Soak your turtle in warm water once a week to maintain proper health (such a healthy defecation and humidity levels).

## Brumation

Brumation is a hibernation like state that box turtles go into during cold winter temperatures. Unlike true hibernation they utilize their fat reserves and can even grow during brumation. Let nature take its course! As temperatures naturally cool down your box turtle will reduce its activity. When it is ready, it will go down for the winter. It is very important to not disturb your turtle during its brumation – not even to soak! As long as your turtle is able to burrow deeply under substrate you do not need to worry about it freezing. As temperatures increase during the spring your turtle will come out of brumation naturally and will be very hungry! If there is any indication that your turtle is unhealthy, do not brumate it. Bring your turtle in during the winter if unhealthy. \*See our Indoor Box Turtle Care Sheet. If you are unsure of the health status of your turtle, take it to a vet appointment before brumation. \*At our website [norcalherp.com](http://norcalherp.com) we list recommended local vets.

