



Bearded Dragon Care

A comprehensive guide on caring for your bearded dragon



Enclosure

Bearded dragons can grow to between 16 to 24 inches long (including their tail) and therefore require an enclosure with a width of at least 18 inches, allowing them to easily turn around in the tank. A 40-gallon breeder tank is the **minimum** size for one adult bearded dragon (measuring 36x18x18); anything larger is welcome.



Lighting & Heat

Bearded dragons live natively in grasslands/deserts of Australia, which produce daytime temps of 85-120°F.

The goal when heating the enclosure is to create a temperature gradient with a cool side around 80-90°F and a hot/basking side around 95-110°F. This will require two types of lighting, a tube UVB that stretches across the entire length of tank and a heat bulb for the hot side. Reptisun 10.0 bulbs are a good choice for the tube UVB, and come in T8 and T5 fixture/bulb sizes. A halogen floodlight is a great choice for the hot basking side and will raise temps in the enclosure to 100-105°F. A 100-watt bulb is appropriate for a 40-gallon tank.

Bearded dragon owners must also be conscious of nighttime temps. If the room that the enclosure is housed in **does not** fall below 65°F, no additional nighttime heat source is needed. However, if temperatures do fall below 65°F, a ceramic heat emitter (CHE) is required for nighttime heat, as it produces no light. Bearded dragons need complete darkness at night and cool temperatures to boost their immune system. The pet stores will often try to sell you a red

heat light. **DO NOT purchase this!!** Red lights have been shown to cause eye irritations in lizards.

Measuring Temperatures

The best and most accurate way to measure temperatures is with an infrared temperature gun. This way you can point it specifically on the basking spot to get a good reading. The thermometers that stick to the side of the tank are only good for measuring ambient air temperature, and are often inaccurate. You can also purchase a thermometer with a probe, which is useful for measuring a temperature in a specific place in the tank.

Substrate & Decor

Avoid loose substrates in the enclosure as they can cause impaction and can harbor unwanted bacteria. Appropriate substrate choices include reptile carpet (which can be machine washed), tile, paper towels, or newspaper. Combinations of multiple substrates, such as reptile carpet and tile, can also be utilized. For a more natural look, a good substrate is decomposed granite (DG). DG starts out as a loose sand-like material and hardens when water is added, creating a desert-look for the enclosure. Start by adding DG directly to the enclosure and mixing water into it. Let the mixture dry and harden. Add more water as necessary and let dry until a hardened substrate is achieved.

Enclosure decor should include both climbing and hiding materials. Bearded dragons like to hide, so a hide big enough for them to turn around in, on the cool side of the enclosure, is best. On the hot basking side, hammocks and big pieces of wood provide basking platforms and places to climb. A simple, low-cost basking platform can be achieved with two bricks and a piece of 10 by 10 inch tile – this provides both a basking site and a hide!



Co-habitation

Bearded dragons are solitary lizards. In the wild they only seek each other out to mate. People will often see them in pet stores housed together. As they grow they will compete for food and

UVB. It may look like they are getting along, one on top of the other, but this is a sign of dominance. **Only house one bearded dragon per enclosure.**

Feeding & Supplements

Bearded dragons are omnivores, which means they eat both vegetables and insects/protein. Different life stages require different feeding needs. Below are the general requirements for the three life stages of bearded dragons:

1. **Baby Bearded Dragons (birth to 4-5 months):** Bugs offered 3 times a day, as much as can be eaten in 10 minutes. Daily vegetables offered (baby dragons typically are not as interested in veggies as in bugs, do not be concerned). Daily dose of calcium and multivitamin supplement.
2. **Young Bearded Dragons (5-18 months):** Daily salad and bugs 4-5 times a week (20-30% veggies and 70-80% bugs weekly). Calcium and multivitamin supplement dose 3-4 times per week.
3. **Adult Bearded Dragons (1.5 years and up):** Daily salad and bugs 1-2 times per week (70-80% veggies and 20-30% bugs weekly). Calcium and multivitamin supplement dose once per week.

To dose calcium and multivitamins, you can either dust the bugs or sprinkle on veggies. For specific bug and veggie nutrition including what to feed and how often, a great online resource is beautifuldragons.com.

Some foods bind calcium and this impacts healthy calcium absorption. For a list of foods that affect calcium uptake see http://www.anapsid.org/iguana/cal_ox.html. Note: While this page is specifically for iguanas, it is also relevant to bearded dragons.



Water

Some bearded dragons will drink from a water bowl, others will not. Try providing your dragon with a bowl of water – make sure to change the water regularly. A bath two times a week will also allow the dragon to drink water. Daily vegetables provide hydration for the bearded dragon.

Bearded Dragon Maintenance

Provide a bowl of vegetables and spot clean the enclosure every day. 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. Provide bugs as appropriate for the age of the dragon on a weekly basis. Also, at least twice a week, soak the dragon in warm water; this will serve the dual purpose of hydrating and cleaning feces off the dragon.

Exercise

Bearded dragons love to roam safely around the house/room. They also enjoy being held. **Only do this if you are comfortable handling your dragon.**