



# Indoor Russian Tortoise

A comprehensive guide on caring for your Russian tortoise kept indoors

## Enclosure

Russian tortoises typically reach 4-10 inches in length (depending on sex, females are larger than males). They will continue to grow throughout their lives, though growth slows with age. These tortoises are long-lived and can reach over 50 years of age with proper care. Russian tortoises are native to Southeastern Russia through Central Asia. They can be found in a variety of habitats including treeless grasslands and rock and scrub filled deserts. Russian tortoises do best when kept in outdoor enclosures. But, if that is not a possibility, it is an option to keep a Russian tortoise inside. The minimum size for an appropriate indoor terrarium would be an enclosure with minimum 5-6 sq ft floor space. Do not house a Russian tortoise in a glass tank, they do not understand glass and will constantly bang against it. An ideal indoor terrarium is a plastic tote or stock tank.



## Substrate & Decor

Appropriate substrates include organic soil (with no manure or additives), woodchips, mulch, coco coir or fiber, or any combination of these. Experimentation will allow you to find what works best for you and your tortoise. Russian tortoises do not need high humidity, so it is important that whatever substrate you use does not hold too much moisture and that it allows for burrowing. Your soil should be slightly moist - it should not be holding water and it should not be completely dry. Too moist and respiratory infections are potential, too dry and an unhealthy, dusty environment is created. Substrates to avoid include: wood shavings of any kind, any

pine/cedar/redwood wood products, paper, and clay-based bedding. These products are not suitable and can have negative effects on Russian tortoises. Small to large flat rocks should be added to the enclosure, as Russian tortoises will use them to keep their long nails trimmed. Change out substrate every 6 months or sooner if it becomes foul. Dependent upon the individual tortoise and substrate type used changing needs may vary.

Plants are great to add to the enclosure, but make sure that they are non-toxic plants for reptiles; Russian tortoises are herbivores and may attempt to eat the plants. The Tortoise Table (<https://www.thetortoisetable.org.uk/>) is a good resource for tortoise safe plants to use in your enclosure. Also include spots for your tortoise to hide. There are many premade hide options available to purchase such as half logs, but also feel free to use your creativity!

## **Lighting, Heat, & Humidity**

Russian tortoises require a basking area with temperatures from 90-100°F during the day. This can be achieved by using a ceramic heat emitter or basking bulb indoors. Ideal nighttime temperature is between 70-80°F, but a Russian tortoise can safely handle lower temperatures if your room temperature drops colder at night. In addition to a basking area, Russian tortoises require UVB lighting to help them metabolize Vitamin D3. Vitamin D3 helps tortoises with calcium uptake that is important for bone and shell growth. A UVB light should be on for 12 hours per day as it is important to maintain day-night cycle. There are multiple options that exist for UVB light and heat sources. For UVB lights it is best to stick with fluorescent tube bulbs (such as Reptisun 10.0) that stretch the length of tank or mercury vapor bulbs that also provide a heat source. It is important to always use a thermostat or rheostat with any heat source. This will prevent temperatures from becoming too high in the enclosure. Always use caution when utilizing heat sources and plastic based enclosures.

## **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 an accurate reading. The thermometers that stick to the side of the tank are only good for measuring ambient air temperature and often are not very accurate. You can also purchase a thermometer with a probe, which are handy at measuring a temperature in a specific place in the tank. When using a probe place it tortoise level. Thermostats will come with a probe that can be kept under the basking spot to regulate that temperature.

## **Co-habitation**

Never co-habitat indoor Russian tortoises. Both males and females can engage in aggressive behavior towards other tortoises and keeping them indoors just does not provide enough space to provide for their needs.

## Feeding & Supplements

Russian tortoises are herbivores. It is important to also offer a variety of produce options to fulfill their nutritional needs. Good produce options to feed a Russian tortoise include leafy greens such as dandelion greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens, bok choy, and romaine. **Stay away from spinach and kale; they have negative impact on calcium uptake.** Additional vegetables that can be fed are: carrots, bell peppers, zucchini, squash, beets, yam, and peas. Fruit should not be a part of a Russian tortoise's diet, with the only exception being a very rare treat if you are inclined to do so.

The foods listed above are some suggestions of common foods fed out – they are not the only ones! Mix and match to see what your tortoise enjoys. Be aware that there are also plenty of commercial pellet foods available that can be offered with produce to provide a well balanced meal, though not all Russian tortoises take to these.

The Tortoise Table website also provides a helpful list of suitable produce for tortoises.

Hatchling and juvenile Russian tortoises 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 produce every other feeding. This is an important supplemental requirement. Calcium powder on produce may cause your Russian tortoise to dislike their produce. If this is the case, switch to powdering their favorite food items. In addition to using a calcium supplement, providing a cuttlebone can also be a good source of calcium if your Russian tortoise is interested. It is beneficial to give your Russian tortoise a sprinkling of a multivitamin such as ReptiVite or Miner-All once every week or two for well balanced health.



## **Water**

Always give your Russian tortoise access to water. A large, shallow saucer pan or water dish with approximately 2 inches of water for adults (less for younger tortoises) will allow the tortoise 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. Vegetables also provide hydration for Russian tortoises.

## **Russian Tortoise Maintenance**

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

## **Exercise**

Russian tortoises love to roam safely around the house/room if this is something you are interested in doing. Make sure you always know where your Russian tortoise is during exercise and they not free-roaming around any animals that may cause them harm, such as dogs.

