



Guide to Caring for Bearded Dragons

Natural History

- Bearded dragons are found in the wild in the rocky, semi-desert areas of Australia and Tasmania. “Bearded” refers to a flap of skin under the chin that gets distended when these creatures are disturbed. They are generally easy to handle or socialize and tolerate handling well. In captivity, bearded dragons can live 7-10 years and reach lengths of 15-20 inches. Sexual maturity is around 10-18 months of age. Bearded dragons are diurnal, meaning they are active during the day and sleep at night. They are omnivores and consume large amounts of insects, plants, fruits, and flowers.

Enclosure

- Due to their quick growth, it is best to have a large, well ventilated enclosure such as a 20 to 40-gallon glass terrarium with a screen top. At minimum it should be 4 times the length and width of the lizard.

Substrate

- The bottom of the enclosure should be covered with something safe and clean. Since bearded dragons will eat bedding made of small particles, you should not use sand (including biodegradable calcium-based sands), wood chips, or gravel. Good choices include newspaper, paper towels, or reptile carpet.

Lighting

- A full spectrum ultraviolet light source (such as ReptiSun) is required for about 12-14 hours each day during spring and summer and 8 hours in the fall and winter. UV rays cannot pass through glass or plastic so avoid any covering between the bulb and the bearded dragon. UV bulbs should be replaced every 6 months (even if the light is not burned out). Most UVB bulbs do not produce much heat, so a heat lamp should also be provided for basking. White lights should not be used at night as bearded dragons need darkness for proper sleep. Additional nighttime heat, if needed, can be provided with ceramic heat emitters (preferred) or under-tank heat mats (may cause thermal burns).

Humidity

Keep the humidity level between 20-40%. A hygrometer (humidity gauge) will help you to monitor humidity.

Temperature

- Daytime maintain between 75-85°F (24-29°C).
- Basking spot keep at 88-100°F (31-38°C).

- Night keep around 70-75°F (21-24°C). Levels can be monitored by thermometers placed at both the cool and hot ends of the enclosure.

Cage Furniture

- Bearded dragons are ground dwellers but will climb rocks and low branches. Provide branches to climb, rocks to bask upon, and shelter to hide in. Ideally a rock should be placed under the heat lamp and a similar item in the cool area as well.
- Hardy plants like sansevieria, aloe, palms, and cycads may be used.

Water

- always Keep a shallow bowl of fresh water available for drinking. Change the water daily. Bearded dragons enjoy a shallow soak weekly in warm water and misting.

Maintenance

- The enclosure should be spot checked for feces daily. Remove and replace soiled and wet portions of the substrate to prevent bacterial and fungal growth. Change the substrate and disinfect the enclosure with dilute soap or dilute bleach solution on a regular basis and rinse thoroughly. Always wash your hands before and after cleaning the enclosure and accessories.

Handling

- Always supervise children when they are interacting with bearded dragons. Give 3-4 days for adjustment to new surroundings and then attempt to handle for short amounts of time. Never handle a lizard by the tail – it could break off. Pick dragons up with all 4 feet supported.

Bearded Dragon Diet

Bearded dragons are omnivores and consume large amounts of insects, plants, fruits, and flowers. A salad of greens and other vegetables (70%), and insects (25%) should be offered to adult bearded dragons daily. Young lizards require more protein so should be offered more insects (~50%). Remove uneaten insects at the end of the day. Fresh foods require their own dish and should be removed daily (ideally after 4 hours).

Recommended greens/vegetables		Treats only, give occasionally	
collards	acorn squash	apples	papayas
dandelion greens/flowers	bell peppers (any color)	apricots	pears
endive	carrots	bananas	tomatoes
grape leaves	green beans	berries	geranium flowers
mustard greens	peas	cantaloupe	pansies
turnip greens	sweet potato	grapes	petunias
green/red leaf lettuce	turnips	oranges	rose

Avoid

- Cabbage, chard, and kale are high in calcium oxalates which can cause metabolic bone disease.
- Spinach, broccoli and parsley are high in goitrogens (produces a goiter) which decrease thyroid function.

Insects

- Bearded dragons eat live insects like “gut loaded” (insects fed a special supplement to have extra nutrients) crickets, mealworms, or waxworms.
- Insects should be chosen based on the size of the lizard. Small prey must be fed to baby bearded dragons to avoid health problems (impaction, etc.). Start with feeding pinhead crickets and tiny, freshly molted worms, moving slowly and gradually to larger sizes. Always feed in a dish to avoid ingestion of substrate.

Supplements

- Most bearded dragons on a good diet of leafy greens with gut-loaded and dusted insects do not require additional supplementation.

Safety

Please remember that all pets may bite or scratch and could transmit disease to humans. Because all lizards are potential carriers of infectious diseases (such as Salmonella), always wash hands before and after handling and/or cleaning the habitat to prevent potential spread of diseases. Infants, children under the age of 5, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and the infirm or elderly are at a greater risk for infection. These individuals should use caution when in contact the pet or its habitat. Consult your doctor for more information.

Supply List

- Glass terrarium of appropriate size w/screen top
- Substrate (reptile carpet, etc.)
- Artificial/natural hiding area and basking site
- Spray bottle for misting
- Water (non-chlorinated okay)
- Reptile cage thermometers (2)
- Reptile cage hygrometer
- Food and water dishes
- Climbing décor
- Cage cleaner and disinfectant
- Bearded dragon book for more information
- UV bulb and fixture (basking spot lamp)
- Ceramic heat emitter (for night-time heat)
- Appropriately sized live gut-loaded crickets, mealworms, or waxworms
- Appropriate fresh veggies/leafy greens
- Appropriate fresh fruit/treats
- Plants for décor (if needed)