

Diamondback Terrapin Care

Natural History

Diamondback terrapins are a native species to the United States ranging from Massachusetts to Texas. They live in brackish water, predominantly marsh areas near the ocean. In the wild they mostly feed on clams, shrimp, snails, and small fish. They will eat some vegetation but are primarily carnivores.

Enclosure/Tank

- Watertight aquarium as large as possible to accommodate for growth of turtle. *Ideally males should be housed in a minimum of 75 gallons, and females in a minimum of 100 gallons.*
 - At least 1.5 to 2 times the turtle's total length in depth
 - Length needs to be at least 4-5 times the turtle's total body length
 - Front to back width should be at least 2-3 times the turtle's body length
 - Enough room for your turtle to swim, dive, and easily flip itself to a normal position if it gets turned upside-down
- Provide an area of dry land for the turtle to easily "haul out", dry off, and bask
 - Floating or anchored cork rafts or logs are another alternative
- Avoid rough rocks that can scratch the turtle's shell
- Bottom should be bare or covered with gravel, if using pebbles, they should be bigger than the turtle can swallow. Bare bottom tanks are easier to keep clean.
 - Crushed coral (1/8" – 1/4") is another substrate alternative and can be found in most saltwater fish stores

Water

Water quality is the most important factor in keeping Diamondback terrapins healthy. Severe and life-threatening skin and eye infections can occur if the water isn't maintained properly.

Temperature: Water temperature should be monitored with an aquarium thermometer

- A submersible water heater or a waterproof heat pad placed underneath the tank can be used to heat the water

Hatchlings	85F
Juveniles	82F
Adults	76F – 80F

Filtration and Cleaning:

- Water should be filtered. The size of the pump will vary based on the filter and the size of the tank. The water should be turn over about 3 to 4 times an hour. UV filter should also be added to the output of the filter to keep the water clean and clear.
- A 10-20% water change should be performed weekly
- Uneaten food and feces should be removed daily

Brackish vs Fresh Water:

A brackish water tank is highly recommended. When housed in fresh water a terrapin’s chances of developing shell rot and skin infections are greater than if they are housed in brackish water.

- Adult diamondback terrapins can be kept at a salinity of 1.012 - 1.014
 - To obtain this level start by adding 1.5 cups of rock salt for every 10 gallons of water. Let it circulate in the tank for 24 hours then measure the water with a specific gravity meter. (It will probably be around 1.010). Add another half a cup of rock salt for every 10 gallons of water and wait another 24 hours before testing it again. Do this until the water reaches the desired saline level. It normally takes about 3 cups of rock salt for every 10 gallons to obtain 1.018 salinity. (Source: <https://www.diamondbackterrapin.com/tank-setups/>)

Your terrapin will need to be soaked in fresh water for 15 minutes once or twice weekly to maintain proper hydration when housed in brackish water

Area Heating

- A Basking area that sits completely above the water line should be easily accessible
- Provide bright, white light focused on the basking area that heats the area to approximately 90°F during the day
- Temperature should be monitored continuously with multiple thermometers

Lighting

- UVA/UVB is necessary for proper bone growth and maintenance
 - Light should be placed within 12 to 18 inches of the turtle’s basking area
 - Light should not be blocked by glass or plastic that can filter the UV rays
 - Change the light bulb every 6 months
- Allowing your turtle to bask and soak in direct sunlight is another option
 - Providing 30min of real sunlight per week can be very beneficial
 - Ensure the enclosure is not getting too warm (not above 90F)

Diet

Feeding your terrapin in a sperate container will help keep the tank much cleaner

Hatchlings and Juveniles

- Feed once daily – approximately as much as they can eat in 15 minutes

Adults

- Feed once every 2-3 days to avoid obesity

Commercial Diets	25-50% of total diet	Aquatic turtle pellets and sticks
Animal Protein	50-75% of total diet	Live feeder fish, frozen/dried krill, insects, shellfish, crustations
Vegetation	Occasionally	Dark leafy greens (collards, mustard, dandelion green, romaine lettuce, broccoli), Shredded carrots, squash, green beans, apples, melons, Edible aquatic plants

Vitamin supplements: Reptile multivitamin (with vitamin A and calcium) twice a week