

BEARDED DRAGON CARE

Bearded dragons come from Eastern Australia. They can grow up to 50 cm (1.5 feet) in length and can live up to approximately 12 years in captivity.



HOUSING

- As large a vivarium as possible should be provided to enable room for exercise and to allow a thermal gradient to be created along the length of the tank (hot to cold). Wooden or fibreglass vivaria are ideal as this provides the lizard with some visual security and ventilation can be provided at lizard level. We recommend a minimum vivarium size of 48x24x24".
- Good ventilation is required and additional ventilation holes may need to be created.
- Hides are required to provide some security. Artificial plants, cardboard boxes, plant pots, logs or commercially available hides can be used. They should be placed both at the warm and cooler ends of the tank. Ensure hides are secure to minimise injury.
- There are a number of commercially available substrates available for lizards including many soil / sand mixes. Care should be taken not to feed your lizard directly on the substrate to avoid accidental ingestion and blockages (especially with wood chip or sand based substrates). Newspaper or paper towels are easy to maintain and can work well in the short-term. However, they do not allow for natural behaviours so for longer term housing, it is worth considering more natural substrate types.
- The vivarium should be spot cleaned as soon as any waste appears to help prevent disease and fully cleaned once a month with a reptile safe disinfectant.

TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITY

- Reptiles depend on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature, so supplementary heating is required to create a temperature range.
- Typically a basking area is created using a light emitting spot bulb, providing a basking temperature of 38-42°C. This should be kept on for a minimum of 12 hours a day and switched off at night.
- Heat sources must be attached to a thermostat and measured with a digital maximum/minimum thermometer to ensure the tank does not overheat. The cool end should be maintained at ~25°C.
- Background heat can be provided with a heat mat (on the back wall) a tubular heater, a heat plate or a ceramic bulb. This should be set on a thermostat so that the overnight temperature does not drop below ~20°C.
- Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns (see separate handout on heating for reptiles).
- Humidity should be checked with a hygrometer placed in the middle of the vivarium and kept at between 30-40%.

LIGHTING

- Bearded dragons need daily exposure to full spectrum lighting (including UV-b light).
- Various UV lamps are available (see separate handout on lighting for reptiles), but for bearded dragons a lamp with a high output (e.g. 10-12%) should be used to mimic the strong sunlight of their wild environment.
- Lamps should be kept on for ~ 12 hours per day and at an appropriate distance from the lizard as recommended by the manufacturer. A branch or rock can be placed below the basking site.
- All lamps should be changed at least as frequently as manufacturer's instructions or checked regularly for their UV output.

WHAT TO FEED

- Bearded dragons are omnivores so will eat both live food and vegetables. However they need less live food as they age. Dark leafy greens and weeds should be the main vegetable matter offered.
- Juveniles will take a higher percentage of live food such as house crickets, black crickets, dubia roaches and locusts. Mealworms should only be given in moderation while waxworms and morio worms should only be given as occasional treats due to their high fat content.
- Live food should be gut loaded before feeding to your lizard, ideally with a complete invertebrate diet. Live food should also be dusted with both vitamin and mineral supplementation regularly. We recommend alternating dusting with a calcium supplement (e.g. Calcidust) and a combined vitamin/mineral supplement (e.g. Nutrobal). Live food should be fed immediately after dusting and removed from the enclosure if not eaten within 30 minutes.
- Water should always be available via a container that is large enough it will allow the lizard to submerge completely. This should be changed daily. Regular bathing may also be enjoyed but is not necessary.

COMPANIONS

- In general the happiest lizard is the solitary lizard so we recommend housing alone.

SALMONELLA

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella.
- However it is rarely a cause of illness in reptiles and treatment is not often required.
- It can be transmitted to people (especially young children or those who are immuno-compromised) so good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap is sufficient. There are commercially available disinfectants that can be used as an alternative.



ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS

We recommend annual health checks every year for pet reptiles as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

INSURANCE

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are

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covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.