

BEARDED DRAGON CARE

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

HOUSING

- As large a vivarium as possible should be provided to enable room for exercise, and 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.
- 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.
- Substrates suitable for housing lizards include newspaper, Astroturf and some of the commercially available substrates. It is important that the substrates either cannot be eaten, or if they are, do not cause blockages as this can prove fatal. Wood chip based substrates should never be used for this reason.
- The vivarium should be cleaned out at least once a week with a suitable disinfectant and spot cleaned daily to help prevent disease.

TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITY

- Reptiles are ectothermic so a heat source is required.
- Typically a spot area is created using a spot bulb, providing a basking temperature of 35-40°C. This should be kept on all day. Temperatures must be measured to ensure the tank is not overheating especially in a small vivarium. 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.
- Temperatures should be measured with a maximum/minimum thermometer. During the cold winter months careful checking is required to ensure the heat sources are keeping the tank sufficiently warm. Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns.
- Humidity should be checked with a hygrometer and kept low

COMPANIONS

- In general the happiest lizard is the solitary lizard. Adults can be maintained in pairs if breeding is desired

LIGHTING

- Bearded dragons must be exposed to UV-b light.
- The best sources are the mercury vapour lamps which give out heat as well. This will need to be on all day for 12 hours and at an appropriate distance from the lizard as recommended by the manufacturer. A small branch or rock can be placed below the basking site. Care should be taken using mercury vapour bulbs in a small vivarium as temperatures may become too high and these lamps cannot be fitted to a thermostat.
- Alternatively other UV-b bulbs are available (please ask for further information on UV light in reptiles)
- All UV-b bulbs should be checked regularly for their UV output and should be changed at least as frequently as manufacturer's instructions.

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 salad items and weeds should be the main vegetable matter offered.
- Juveniles will take a higher percentage of live food such as house crickets, black crickets and locusts. Mealworms should only be given in moderation. Waxworms should only be given as occasional treats.
- Live food should be gut loaded with a high calcium content supplement (8% of calcium in the dry matter) and many products are commercially available. It is worth checking the label for the calcium content. Live food should also be dusted with a high calcium balancer with little or no phosphorous content. Live food should be fed immediately after dusting and removed if not eaten within 30 minutes. Vegetables should also be dusted.
- Water should always be available and a container is required which will allow the lizard to submerge completely. This should be changed daily. Regular bathing may also be enjoyed.

SALMONELLA

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella.
- However it is rarely a cause of illness in reptiles and treatment is not 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 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.