

MAP TURTLE CARE

The Map turtles are semi-aquatic freshwater chelonians originating from North America where they can be found over a large area from Texas to Canada. These turtles can grow up to 30cm as adults, and live for over 30 years. There are a number of commonly kept *Graptemys* species, so the following care sheet will outline basic care of any of these species.

HOUSING

- Map turtles should be housed in an enclosure which is easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. They should have access to both a land area where they can rest and bask, and a water area where they can swim. A combination of real and plastic plants will also provide hiding places, and add interest to a turtle's environment.
- The water area should have a gentle slope providing easy access, be of a reasonable depth, with a decent filtration system being an essential requirement. The aim of the filter is to ensure good water circulation and a high standard of water quality, as dirty stagnant water poses a health risk both to turtles and to humans. It is worth bearing in mind that the waste produced by turtles is much more than most filter units intended for aquariums can handle, and a powerful filter may be required for larger turtles. External canister filters are usually the most effective for adult turtles, drastically reducing the need for frequent water changes, although internal canister filters can work well for small hatchlings.
- Water quality is important and should be checked every few weeks with a test kit, to ensure the water is free from toxic chemicals and at the correct pH. Water conditioning treatments may also be necessary to neutralise any toxic chemicals in the water.

TEMPERATURES AND HUMIDITY

- A basking area is created using a spot bulb, providing a basking temperature of 32°C. This should be kept on all day. The water temperature should be maintained at 24-26°C, with temperatures no lower than 20°C overnight. There are several types of heat sources available, with an underwater heater being the most effective at providing background heat. Underwater heaters however, are generally designed for fish, so can be easily destroyed and dangerous to large boisterous turtles, and only the sturdiest varieties should be used. The temperatures should be measured with a maximum/minimum thermometer. During the cold winter months careful checking is required to ensure that the heat sources are keeping the tank sufficiently warm. Heat sources should be guarded or kept at a height to prevent thermal burns.
- Turtles 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 a distance of 30 cm (1 foot) from the turtle. An area of slate or plywood can be used under the basking site to retain some warmth. The mercury vapour lamps cannot be fitted to a thermostat. These lamps should be checked regularly for their UV output and should be changed at least annually. In the summer, turtles can be exposed to natural UV light in an outdoor pond, but should be acclimatised slowly.

- Maintenance of the filter system is the most important way to maintain good hygiene and the filter will need cleaning regularly, but even with a filter system, regular water changes will be necessary. The land area of the tank should also be cleaned out at least weekly and a suitable disinfectant used.

WHAT TO FEED

- Map turtles are naturally omnivorous, but rely more on insects, molluscs and crustaceans than some other species. In captivity therefore, animal matter should make up 70-80% of the diet, with the remaining 20-30% being green leafy vegetables or aquatic plants. Animal matter may include rehydrated low fat dried cat, dog or trout pellets, raw pre-killed small fish, bloodworms, earthworms, and good quality proprietary foods. Fresh food should be provided daily to juveniles, and every 2-3 days to adults, ideally no more than can be consumed in 30-40 minutes. Feeding in a separate tank will help keep the water clean, but frequent handling may stress some turtles, so may not be appropriate in every case.
- Supplementation is important, and a vitamin and mineral powder with high calcium content is required. It is important to ensure the phosphorous content is low.

COMPANIONS

- In general the happiest turtle is the solitary turtle. Adults can be maintained in single sex groups of up to five in suitable accommodation.

SALMONELLA

- All reptiles can potentially carry Salmonella but it is rarely a cause of illness in turtles.
- It can be transmitted to people and good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap or a commercially available disinfectant is sufficient.

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.