

## TORTOISE CARE

## PET CARE SHEET

Tortoises prefer roaming and foraging for food but like to dig – solid walls or fences are required to prevent escape. An alternative is to provide a 2 x 2m square pen with 75cm high weatherproof plywood walls, - cover half this pen with mesh and half with transparent plastic. Provide a weatherproof and vermin proof shelter and a ½ to 1” deep pond with a flat entry / exit for bathing, drinking and urination – though adults rarely drink obtaining most of their fluid from their food, Greenhouses or large garden frames make good tortoise quarters.

Tortoises will only eat if outside temperature is above 70 F, feeding activity can be extended by bathing the tortoise in a warm bath every morning for 10 – 20 minutes or by providing extra warmth especially at night. Tortoises require a high fibre, low protein & high mineral diet. Offer fresh food daily - coarse weeds especially dandelion leaf and flower, grass and thistle should form the bulk of the diet. This can be supplemented with sedum, fuschia leaves and flowers, honeysuckle flowers, Russian vine, rose petals but not leaves broccoli, grated carrot, spinach, rocket, pepper and watercress. Cucumber, tomato, strawberry and apple can be given but in small quantities. Complete diets, soaked before feeding, can be used together with the foods above and are eaten readily especially by baby tortoises. All food for tortoises under 3 years should be lightly dusted with a calcium / vitamin supplement e.g. Nutrobal and older tortoises should have supplement at least 1 day per week Meat and animal proteins are best avoided. Alfalfa hay (obtained from horse feed suppliers) is a good bedding and will also be eaten in small quantities providing extra fibre. Avoid milk containing products eg Milupa as many tortoises are milk intolerant. Cuttlefish keeps beaks in trim and is a source of calcium.

Weigh your Tortoise monthly to monitor eating and health prior to hibernation. It is wise to have tortoises checked prior to hibernation (in September) especially females who can be x-rayed to ensure they do not have retained eggs. Tortoises should be wormed at least once yearly. A useful source of information is the Tortoise Trust Website [www.tortoisetrust.org](http://www.tortoisetrust.org)

**CARE OF SICK TORTOISES** Keep warm – 80 deg F during day and 70 deg F at night.

Allow drinking ( see feeding above) twice daily, a bath also provides the tortoise with the opportunity to urinate and defaecate. Offer food, as above – it may be necessary to open the beak carefully and place small amounts on the back of the tongue. If the tortoise fails to eat within 2-3 days, contact the surgery.

**HIBERNATION** Bring tortoise in before feeding ceases in autumn, check for any small wounds. Use tea chest drilled with mouse proof ventilation holes and line base with polystyrene chips or paper. Put tortoise in a cardboard box and cover with chips or paper. Put small tortoise containing box in chest and in fill with chips or paper. Keep at 4-10 deg C (frost free – not outside) – use a maximum / minimum thermometer to ensure temperature stays in the correct range. Check weight of tortoise weekly (this does not wake animal) – any loss of weight greater than 1% of body weight per month necessitates waking tortoise. **Only hibernate healthy tortoises** If the tortoise has not eaten well during the summer it may be wise to prevent hibernation, - the decision to do this should be made in August or September before activity slows. Provide heat, preferably using a heat lamp so that the temperature is approx 77deg F (25 deg C) during the day ( it can drop to no lower than 65 deg F 20 deg C at night ) within a 1 metre square pen so that there is a hot spot under the lamp and a gradually decreasing temperature away from the lamp. Beware thermostats which can malfunction and cause overheating. Provide UVB light for 13 – 14 hours daily – e.g. Powersun 100W bulb ( which also provides a heat source) After hibernation inspect and weigh, warm gradually to 77 deg F by placing in a shallow dish containing warm water – eating should start within 2-3 days, if not contact the surgery. Further information is available at [www.tortoisetrust.org](http://www.tortoisetrust.org)

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