

Bearded dragon care

Bearded dragons belong to the genus *Pogona* (meaning beard), which includes eight species. The most common pet bearded dragons are the central or inland bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) and the pygmy dragon (*Pogona henrylawsoni*). Bearded dragons make great pets; they have a calm and friendly personality, and with appropriate care, they can live a healthy and happy life for ~ 12 years.

Enclosure

- Enclosure size varies with size and age of the dragon; a rough guide is 1-1.8m (long) x 0.6m (wide) x 0.6-0.9m (high)
- Enclosure should be constructed of materials that retain heat and are easy to clean (plastic/acrylic and wood). Glass enclosures are not ideal as they don't retain heat well.
- Newspaper or paper towels are the most hygienic and easy to clean substrates, and this limits sand ingestion
- Provide climbing and hiding furniture (branches, rocks) for enrichment, activity and improved thermoregulation

Diet. Bearded dragons are omnivores/insectivores.

- Juveniles eat ~ 70% insects, 30% plants. Adults eat ~ 50% each.
- Juveniles (2-4 mo) eat two to three times a day. Adults eat once every two to three days. Feed as much as they can eat in 5-10 minutes. Food items should be smaller than 1/3 width of their head.
- Insects include crickets, locusts, roaches, waxworms, silkworms and superworms. Gut-load the insects with a commercial formula prior to feeding out.
- Plant foods include raw vegetables (eg. bok choy, spring mix, endive, dandelion, carrot, broccoli, capsicum) and native vegetation (*Eremophilas* sp., *Hemiandra pungens*, *Crowea*, *Correa* and *Grevillea*). Offering washed/wet plant foods helps to increase water intake.
- Calcium-poor foods should be lightly dusted with calcium powder each time, and multivitamin powder every 2 weeks, immediately before being fed. Alternatives to powder include calcium liquid and multivitamin gels.
- To minimise the risk of malnutrition, feed your dragon at least 3 varieties of insects and 3 varieties of plant foods.
- Provide a shallow water dish for drinking. Spraying their head with water also encourages drinking.

Temperature

- Monitor the temperature with at least 2 digital thermometers placed at the level of your dragon
- Basking spot: 35-40C provided with a thermostatically-controlled globe
- Cool end: 25-28C
- Night temp: 21C or higher. Use a heat mat underneath the enclosure if required. Do not use hot rocks

UV light

- Provide UVB radiation 290-320nm. This is required for vitamin D3 production in the skin, which allows calcium absorption from the gut. Recommended light cycle is 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness.
- UV globes should be placed in the same position as the heat lamp, within a distance recommended by the manufacturer, and not filtered by glass. Replace the globe at least every 6 months (even if the globe still appears to be working).
- No artificial UV globe is a replacement for natural sunshine. Take your dragon outside in a secure carrier/cage for 20-30 minutes of unfiltered sunshine 2-3 times a week. Make sure shade is provided to prevent overheating.

Humidity

- This is an overlooked aspect of bearded dragon care as it is often thought that dragons don't require humidity because they are from the desert. However, in their natural habitat they seek out humid microenvironments. By not providing access to humidity, the dragons are prone to problems secondary to dehydration (eg. constipation and intestinal blockages, shedding problems, kidney disease).
 - A humid microenvironment can be provided by having a plastic container with a hole cut out as a door and placing moist paper towels inside the container. Replace the paper towels daily.
 - Shallow soak your dragon in lukewarm water once a week.

Health care

- Dragons should have annual health checks, especially if they brumate or are used for breeding
- Weigh your dragon regularly (~ once weekly) and record the weight
- Any newly acquired dragons should be quarantined and health checked
- Wash your hands after handling your dragon and between handling of different reptiles