

## 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. All glass enclosure may not retain heat well as glass is a poor insulator.
- There are many substrate options, all having pros and cons. Newspaper or paper towels are an easy to clean substrate with little risk of causing a blockage.
- Provide climbing and hiding furniture (branches, rocks) for enrichment, activity and improved thermoregulation
- Outdoor enclosures should be considered if the local climate permits, ensuring both shade and sunshine are available and the area is predator and escape proof.
- Disinfect enclosure once weekly and spot clean as needed

### 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, silkworms, woodies, locusts, soldier fly larvae. Gut-load the insects with a high-quality commercial formula prior to feeding out.
- **Plant foods** include raw vegetables (eg. bok choy, spring mix, endive, dandelion, carrot, broccoli, capsicum) and native/wild vegetation (*Eremophilas* sp., *Hemiandra pungens*, *Crowea*, *Correa*, *Grevillea* and dandelions). Offering washed/wet plant foods helps to increase water intake.
- **Supplements:** calcium-poor insect and plant foods should be lightly dusted with calcium carbonate powder each time, and multivitamin powder every 2 weeks, immediately before being fed. Additional supplements, such as omnivore powders (eg. EarthPro-OmniGold), may also be used.
- 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: 21C (to allow your dragon to thermoregulate)
- Night temp: not below 21C. 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 positioned within a distance recommended by the manufacturer from the basking spot (usually ~30cm), 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, there is an increased risk of health 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 (up to dragon's elbow height) your dragon in lukewarm water once a week.

#### Health care

- Newly acquired dragons should be quarantined and examined by a vet, which may include parasite testing and blood tests. Annual check-ups are recommended thereafter, especially if they are used for breeding.
- Weigh your dragon regularly and record the weight
- Wash your hands after handling your dragon and between handling of different reptiles