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**Red-Footed Tortoise Habitat**

Young red-footed tortoises can be raised indoors if the outside conditions are beyond their tolerance. While outdoor housing is preferred anytime the temperatures are in the acceptable range, many people raise their red-foots indoors for the first few years. Probably the best enclosures to use indoors are simple PVC Cage or a tote which you can make yourself. The container itself is as important as the furnishings put into it, which include substrate, lighting, temperature gradients and cage furniture. In colder climates, a suitable enclosure can be built in the garage for large tortoises during the winter. These enclosures should be heated enough to keep the tortoises comfortable during the indoor months.

On top of keeping a moderate humidity level in the enclosure, all baby red-footed tortoises raised indoors should have access to a humid hiding area where they can snuggle in and get a dose of humidity, much like they would in a natural burrow. This more humid microclimate helps their shells to grow smoothly and helps in keeping the tortoise hydrated. Tortoises raised without proper humidity tend to dehydrate quickly and form “bumpy” shells as they grow. Using the tote method helps with the humidity situation very easily.

Many different **substrates** can be used for indoor red-footed tortoise enclosures. For all sizes of tortoise, cypress mulch mixed with coco fiber has proven to be a great bedding. It’s absorbent, safe and relatively low cost. Other good options include coconut coir or peat moss. Outdoor enclosures don’t need fancy substrates, provided that the soil is natural and not tainted with any chemicals or fertilizers.

I also include a few large, flat rocks in the enclosure. They help file down the tortoises’ nails and give them a clean surface for food. And several hides and décor for exploration if indoors and older than babies. Outdoors you can offer grass plants and other tortoise safe plants for them to hide under. Be aware to make sure it’s safe as they love to munch on everything.

Red-footed tortoises that live outdoors are tolerant to various temperature ranges. High temperatures are generally not going to be a problem provided that the tortoise has a shaded area to escape to if desired and constant access to water to soak in and drink. We keep our adult red-footed tortoises outdoors in Georgia with temperatures of up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit occasionally and have had no losses to heat. Keep in mind the fact that our red-footed tortoise “jungle” is sprayed with sprinklers several times a day, which lowers the overall temperature in that area and raises humidity.

The tortoises themselves can also handle surprisingly cold temperatures, as low as 65 degrees, with no problems. When nighttime temperatures drop below 65 degrees, a heated hide box should be provided that maintains at least 65 degrees at night (in the 70s is better), or the tortoises should be brought in during those times. Red-footed tortoises are kept outdoors year round in some parts of the country where nighttime lows in the winter are 20 degrees (including here in Georgia). It is absolutely required that these tortoises are checked on each evening to make sure they get into a heated area and do not fall asleep out in the open and become exposed to cold temperatures at night.

Indoors, red-footed tortoises can be maintained at normal room temperatures: 74 to 80 degrees. They should also have a basking area heated by an overhead light. This warm spot should be in the 90-degree range. We provide a UVB light in the indoor enclosures to help them properly process the calcium in their diets. Lights should run 12 hours a day, and a mild heat source can be used 24/7 over the hide box area Lamp timers make the light cycle consistent and easy.

Red-footed tortoises exist in a wide variety of habitats in the wild, from grassland to jungle, almost all with moderate to high humidity and moderate temperatures. Red-foots can handle variable amounts of humidity in captivity once grown, but babies should be kept humid to ensure proper smooth shell growth in their first few years.

Red-footed tortoises do not hibernate but will go through a winter slow-down period during cooler weather and shortened day-lengths. As adults, red-footed tortoises can safely handle body temperatures as low as 60 degrees at night as long as they are able to heat up into the 70s during the day. Summer temperatures up to 100 degrees can be tolerated as long as there is a cooler, shaded retreat the tortoise can get into. Moisture is not a problem in warmer temperatures (a cool mudhole on a hot day), but the tortoises should be kept dry on cold nights.

For best and easiest way to raise baby tortoises watch this video by Garden State Tortoise. <https://youtu.be/fG46E6KprtI?si=vKNHuxt_TGeaA8iG>

**Red-Footed Tortoise Food**

Red-footed tortoises are typically eager eaters, rarely turning down a meal. With adult tortoises, we feed them the best mix possible of various fruits, veggies, flowers and leaves. They will also graze on mulberry leaves, grape leaves, hibiscus leaves and flowers. They enjoy Mazuri tortoise diet as much as any tortoise does and having this on hand works well for a backup plan if you can’t get to the store for fresh greens, and it is a good supplemental diet. Mazuri tortoise pellets works well to cover any of the nutritional bases that the other diet may have missed.

Feed adult tortoises the best mix possible of various fruits, veggies, flowers and leaves. We also use spring mixes (particularly with baby red-footed tortoises), which have several leafy ingredients in them, and we supplement with collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens and any of the darker lettuce types (no spinach or kale or lettuce). Cactus pads have become a major part of the diet of many of our tortoises as well. Variety is the key. Be sure to check tortoise table app for safe flowers, leaves etc. for your tortoise.

It is generally thought that red-footed tortoises need more protein in their diet than many other species. We make a meat mash that we give them in small amounts 1 time a week and then mazuri 2 times a week.

**Meat mash**- ground up and cooked turkey (1b), boil a sweet potato, chop/blend up frozen blue berries, frozen raspberries, frozen strawberries, frozen black berries (cup each), your selection of greens, ½ cup chopped yellow squash, ½ cup bell pepper (any color). When turkey and sweet potato have cooled mix all ingredients in 1 bowl. Then divide into serving size based on your tortoise size and number of tortoises. Freeze what you aren’t using. Be sure to sprinkle your calcium on top when serving. I serve ours on a bed of greens.

Feed tortoises from a flat rock or concrete surface. This helps with impaction and also helps keep their beak trimmed. To prevent them from eating soil or rocks, never feed tortoises directly from a gravel or dirt surface. Red-footed tortoises are grazers and will munch on any plants in their enclosure. We like to use various hibiscus, palm trees and clump grasses in our enclosures to provide them with a somewhat renewable food source.

**Red-Footed Tortoise Water**

Red-footed tortoises should have water dishes or small ponds in their outdoor enclosures. We use shallow, low-sided dishes that are glazed to make cleaning easy. Cleaning must be done on a regular basis, as most tortoises tend to soak in their dishes and defecate in them. We provide water dishes to our red-footed tortoises all year, although their use of them in the winter is very minimal. We also provide small “mudholes” and puddle-areas that the tortoises can sit in to stay cool during the hot months (if outside).

When red-footed tortoises are housed indoors, shallow water dishes can be used, but again, they need very regular cleaning. In shallow water, the tortoises usually begin drinking immediately and flush their systems at the same time. Baby and juvenile red-footed tortoises tend to dry out much quicker than larger, more established tortoises. They can also be soaked outside the enclosure in shallow, warm water once or twice a week for 15 to 30 minutes to get fully hydrated, which also helps keep the main enclosure clean. This is a form of “forced hydration” but works well in keeping the tortoise fully hydrated. This is not needed though if you use the tote set up and see your tortoise bathing naturally.

**Red-Footed Tortoise Health**

For best results, purchase an alert, active red-footed tortoise with bright, clean eyes, or buy one from a reputable source that will guarantee (at least) a live arrival. These tortoises can suffer from most common reptile health problems, but respiratory infections and parasites in the case of imported tortoises are the most prevalent.

Red-footed tortoises can also be prone to respiratory infections if they are kept in cool or wet enclosures. This is evident if the tortoise has a bubbly nose or raspy breathing or makes a gurgling sound as it breathes. In the early stages, it can sometimes be corrected by raising temperatures and lowering humidity for a week or two, but if it gets to the point of bubbling or foaming at the mouth or nose, a vet should be consulted. Please note some red foots are known to make a whistling noise when breathing this is normal. That is going to sound different than a wheezing sound.

**Red-Footed Tortoise Handling and Temperament**

Contrary to what many sellers tell customers, tortoises generally should not be handled with any regularity. They are easily stressed when over handled, and children tend to drop them when spooked. These stress factors can lead to a decline in a tortoise’s activity levels and health.

Juvenile and older red-footed tortoises are generally more resistant to handling, but all tortoises should be handled carefully. Avoid pinning them down or restricting them. Allow them to carry on in their intended way, especially when they’re young. Older red-footed tortoises are usually tolerant of people.

**Resources**

***Tortoise Table*** (also app on phone) https://www.thetortoisetable.org.uk/ A lot of issues I come across is with this being based in the UK many American plants not in there but definitely a great start. If in doubt don’t feed it.

***Mazuri Tortoise chow***- <https://mazuri.com/products/mazuri-tortoise-diets>

***Temp Gun***: <https://www.amazon.com/Etekcity-Lasergrip-774-Non-contact-thermometer/dp/B00837ZGRY?source=ps-sl-shoppingads-lpcontext&ref_=fplfs&psc=1&smid=ATVPDKIKX0DER>

***UVB/Heat light***: <https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/zoo-med-heat-and-uvb-basking-spot-lamp-and-repti-sun-fluorescent-combo-pack-1226703?store_code=2542&mr:device=c&mr:adType=local&cm_mmc=PSH%7cGGL%7cCAL%7cSBU05%7cSH13%7c0%7cpbH4NxwLFqWjH9GAxdXDh1%7c58700007475749897%7cPRODUCT_GROUP%7c0%7c0%7cpla-1458089774388%7c126000475621%7c15108900623&gclid=CjwKCAjwhdWkBhBZEiwA1ibLmBd1XKbiB8eFGzMGcMEUn84CNumiSd5sDte367iyfVLDEma8eB6eshoCYFwQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds>

***Cypress Mulch*** can be found from Lowes and Home Depot