



## Bearded Dragon Care Sheet

### About Bearded Dragons

Bearded Dragons originate from native to the arid regions of Australia. They can have very docile personalities, which makes them pets. Adults can get up to two feet in length. There are several color morphs. With appropriate care bearded dragons can live up to 8-10 years.

### Housing

Cage sizes will vary with age and should be at least three times the length of snout to tail

- Babies: at least 20 gallons
- Adults: 40-75 gallons

Bearded dragons can be very territorial and should be housed separately even between males and females to prevent any injuries.

A variety of substrates can be used with these guys. Depending on the set up you are trying to achieve you can use things like:

- Newspaper, artificial turf like reptile carpet, flat stones or no floor covering are best, especially for beginners.
- Sand, bark, or mulch should be avoided in most cases. While these substrates can provide opportunities for digging, burrowing, and other natural behaviors they should be avoided by inexperienced reptile keepers due to the problems they can cause like excessive ingestion, impaction, and obstruction.
- A flat rock under the basking light will warm evenly and provide a good basking spot.

For loose substrates like sand and soil we recommend feeding outside of the enclosure to prevent any ingestion that can lead to impactions

Lighting and temperature are very important for the health and well-being of beardies. UV lighting is important for the absorption of calcium and helps prevent things like Metabolic Bone Disease. Heat is important for proper digestion. We recommend using UV strips over bulbs to help cover more space in the cage rather than concentrating over one location. UV also cannot penetrate through glass or plastic effectively, so just keeping them by a window isn't super beneficial. UV lights lose their potency within about 6 months of use, and it is recommended to change them out.

UV lights we recommend and proximity to cage:

Arcadia T5 HO Desert 12% / Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 10.0

- Mesh top: 9-11" / 23-27cm (about 10.63 in)
- no mesh: 14-17" / 35-42cm (about 1.38 ft)

Arcadia T5 HO Dragon 14%

- Mesh top: 10-12" / 25-30cm (about 11.81 in)
- no mesh: 14-18" / 35-45cm

Heating again is very important for digestion, energy and even mental health. As stated above, bearded dragons come from Australia's arid regions, so they like it nice and hot. We recommend a basking spot that reached up to 115\* F. Using temperature probes or heat guns is recommended to help keep accurate temperatures throughout the cage. Appropriate temperatures are:

- Basking side surface temperature— 108-113°F (42-45°C)
- Cool side surface temperature — 77-85°F (25-29°C)
- Air temperature gradient — 72-99°F (22-37°C)
- Nighttime — 55-75°F (12-24°C)

If it does get colder than the recommended temperatures, especially at night, then adding supplemental heat such as a ceramic heat emitter will help. For basking light though you should use a bright white light to help replicate the sun.

Humidity once again bearded dragons come from arid environments, so a humidity range of 30-50% is adequate. Humidity can play an important role in shedding. Too little can contribute to shed not coming off successfully, which can lead to blood loss to toes, limbs and tail; causing necrosis of those body parts eventually leading to amputation. On the other side of the spectrum, too much humidity can cause issues such as respiratory infection or fungal growth.

Enrichment for reptiles is a little different from your average cats and dogs. The biggest way to add enrichment to their lives is by décor. In the wild they are running around logs and rocks, so adding things that they can climb over and under will improve their quality of life. Always make sure décor is secure and won't move to prevent accidentally harming your pet. Some owners will provide bioactive setups (cages with living plants and beneficial cleaning insects), which is a great way to increase enrichment, but you just want to make sure that the plants are reptile safe is ingested.

## Diet

Bearded dragons are omnivorous, which just means they require both plants and insects. The insect to plant ratio will vary depending on the age of the lizard. Younger dragons (less than 1 year of age) will require more protein and older than one year will require more vegetables. We recommend a 25% veggie and 75% insect ratio for younger dragons and transitioning to a 75% veggie to 25% insect ratio for adults. Insects given should be no wider than the width between the lizard's eyes and veggies should follow the same rule. As juveniles, you should be offering daily to every other day insects and daily veggies. As adults, you can offer veggies daily to every other day and insects once to twice a week. Below is a list of both insects and veggies that are safe.

Staple greens:

- Arugula/Rocket, Bok choy, Cactus pads, Collard greens/Spring greens, Endive/Chicory, Escarole, Kale\*, Mustard greens, Mustard cress, Pea shoots, Spring mix, Turnip greens, Watercress

\*There is a common myth that kale is high in oxalates and as bad as spinach. However, according to multiple studies, kale is quite low in oxalates, and is recommended by kidney health experts as a "safe" green for those prone to kidney stones. So, although all things must be fed in a rotation, kale is quite safe to be offered regularly.

Occasional veggies:

- Artichoke heart, Asparagus, Basil, Beet leaves, Bell pepper, Carnations, Cilantro, Carrot greens, Cucumber, peeled, Carrot, grated raw, Clover (pesticide- and herbicide-free), Dandelion greens/flowers, Fennel, Lemon balm, Lemongrass, Mint leaves, Nasturtium, Parsley, Parsley, Radicchio, Rosemary, Rose petals, Spinach (valuable source of iodine!), Squash, raw, Sugar snap peas, Swiss chard, Thyme, Yam, grated raw, Zucchini

Poison:

- Avocado, Onion, Mushrooms

Fruit can be given, but due to the high sugar content in fruit, it should be kept to a minimal. If fed in abundance it can lead to health problems such as obesity. Safe options are:

- Apple, Banana, Cactus fruit (aka "prickly pear" or "tuna fruit"), Mango, Melon, Berries, Grapes, Figs, Papaya, Peaches

Staple Insects:

- Black soldier fly larvae, Crickets, Dubia roaches, Discoid roaches, Red runner roaches, Snails

Occasional insects:

- Superworms, Butter worms, Waxworms, Hornworms (Captive only; wild are toxic!), Silkworms

Pinky mice technically can be fed but we only recommend for gravid females due to the higher calcium intake that they need to help with egg production. No more than 1 pinky a month. You may also notice mealworms aren't on the list. That is because they have higher levels of Chitin, a biopolymer that makes the exoskeleton tough, which is harder for lizards to digest and can cause impactions.

Gut-loading insects is highly recommended throughout the reptile community. This adds high nutrition to the insects that your lizard will benefit from. Gut-loading is simple, feed the insects such as crickets roaches, any of the veggies listed above within a 24-hour period before feeding to your lizard.

Water should be available at all times for any animal. Most pet parents won't notice their lizard drinking and that may be because bearded dragons and most other reptiles like moving water. To them stagnant water is dirty water and is "unsafe" to drink. Adding things like a dripper may help with that or soaking your lizard will help too. Soaking is beneficial for hydration, shedding and even to help pass stool. Soaking a bearded dragon in lukewarm water no deeper than half the depth of the lizard 1-2 times a week will help in all those aspects.

Supplements should be added for optimal nutrition and development. Calcium powder is very important for bone health. Metabolic bone disease is common with any reptile and an issue we see often. We recommend dusting insects and sprinkling supplements on veggies. Repashy's calcium plus should be on insects once to twice a week and then Repashy's Calcium low D should be added to every veggie feeding.

If any questions or concerns on care for your bearded dragon, feel free to contact us via phone; 970-663-5494 or by email: [staff@aspenanimalclinic.com](mailto:staff@aspenanimalclinic.com)

Thank you, ACE Staff