

The Armadillo Lizard

Cordylus Tropicosternum

Natural Origin & Habitat

- **Native range:** East Africa
 - Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, Zimbabwe
- **Habitat type:**
 - Dry savannas, rocky outcrops, scrubland
 - Often found in **crevices, rock piles, and burrows**
- **Climate:**
 - Warm, semi-arid to moderately humid depending on region
- **Lifestyle:**
 - **Diurnal (day active)**
 - Semi-arboreal but mostly **rock-dwelling (rupicolous)**
 - Lives in **loose colonies or small groups**

👉 Key takeaway: They are **rock-dwelling baskers that rely heavily on tight hiding spaces for security.**

Size, Lifespan & Temperament

- **Adult size:** 6–8 inches total length
 - **Lifespan:** 10–15+ years with proper care
 - **Temperament:**
 - Generally **calm and hardy**
 - Less skittish than ameivas
 - Can become **fairly tolerant of handling**
 - **Defense behavior:**
 - Flatten body, wedge into cracks
 - May drop tail if stressed (less common than some species)
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Enclosure Setup

Minimum Size

- **Single or pair:** 20–30 gallon long
- **Group (1 male + multiple females):** 40 gallon breeder or larger

👉 Floor space is more important than height, but climbing structures are still important.

Substrate

- Depth: 2–4 inches
- Ideal options:
 - Sand/soil mix (50/50 topsoil + play sand)
 - Excavator clay blends
 - Firm, slightly compactable substrate

👉 They prefer **firm ground + rock surfaces**, not loose, deep digging substrate like ameivas.

Hardscape (VERY important)

- Stacked rocks (securely anchored!)
- Cork bark slabs
- Tight crevices and hides
- Flat basking stones

👉 Provide **multiple tight hiding cracks**—this is critical for reducing stress.

Plants (Optional)

- Drought-tolerant plants (real or fake)
 - Adds cover and visual security
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Water

- Small shallow dish
 - They may drink occasionally but don't rely heavily on standing water
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Temperature & Heating

Basking

- **Basking spot:** 95–105°F
- Use halogen or basking bulb aimed at flat rock

Ambient

- Warm side: 85–90°F
- Cool side: 75–80°F

Night temps

- Drop to 70–75°F is fine

👉 They thermoregulate by moving between rocks and basking zones.



Lighting (CRITICAL)

- **UVB REQUIRED**
 - T5 HO 5.0–10.0 depending on distance
- Photoperiod:
 - 10–12 hours daily

👉 UVB is essential for calcium metabolism and long-term health.



Humidity

- Target: **40–60%**
- Provide:
 - Dry basking area
 - Slightly more humid microclimates in hides

👉 Avoid overly wet conditions—these are not tropical rainforest animals.

Diet & Feeding

Natural Diet

- Primarily **insectivorous**
 - Opportunistic omnivores
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Captive Diet

Staples

- Crickets
- Dubia roaches
- Black soldier fly larvae
- Small locusts

Occasional

- Mealworms / superworms (treat only)
 - Waxworms (rare treat)
 - Small amounts of greens or fruit (optional)
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Feeding Schedule

- Juveniles: daily
 - Adults: every other day (or 3–4x per week)
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Supplements

- Calcium (with D3): 2–3x/week
 - Multivitamin: 1x/week
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Behavior & Social Structure

- Can be kept:
 - **Solo**
 - **Pairs**
 - **Small groups (1 male + females)**

⚠️ Avoid multiple males—they may fight.

- Active, alert, and enjoy basking
 - Spend lots of time wedged in rock crevices
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Handling

- Generally more tolerant than many lizards
 - Still:
 - Avoid frequent handling initially
 - Support the whole body
 - With time, many become calm and manageable
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Maintenance

- Spot clean waste regularly
 - Replace substrate every 1–3 months
 - Clean water dish often
 - Check rock stability frequently (very important)
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Shedding






- Shed in patches
 - Provide:
 - Rough surfaces (rocks, bark)
 - Slight humidity boost if needed
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Reproduction

- **Live-bearing species (viviparous)**
- Gestation: several months
- Usually produce **1–3 offspring at a time**

👉 Babies are fully formed and independent.

Common Mistakes

-  Loose or unstable rock structures (collapse risk)
 -  Too much humidity
 -  No UVB
 -  Keeping multiple males together
 -  Too few hiding crevices
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Ideal Setup Summary

- 20–40 gallon enclosure
- Rock-heavy layout with tight crevices
- Basking: 95–105°F
- Ambient gradient: 75–90°F
- UVB lighting
- Moderate humidity (40–60%)
- Insect-based diet with supplements