



# The Slayer's Guide to a Happy & Healthy Dragon

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## Introduction To Bearded Dragons

Bearded dragons (also known as the central bearded dragon or *Pogona Vitticeps*) are agamid lizards native to eastern and central Australia. They can be found in a variety of habitats, including semi-arid desert, scrublands, and dry forests. They earned their name from their spiky, expandable throat pouch that can look very much like a beard, especially when it darkens to black.

These lizards are diurnal, meaning that they are most active during the day. They love to bask, and are commonly found sunbathing on everything from rocks and fallen branches to fence posts and picnic tables. Although they are technically terrestrial, bearded dragons are both excellent climbers and skilled burrowers, and naturally dig burrows for shelter from predators and the elements.

Bearded dragons tend to be 18" -24" (45-61 cm) long from snout to tail, weigh between 10-18 oz (283-511 g), and have a lifespan of 10-15+ years. They are usually sexually mature and fully grown at 1-2 years old. They also possess a variety of adaptations that make them perfectly suited to their natural environment:

- Sticky tongue for grabbing insect prey, like a chameleon
- Third (parietal) eye on top of their head for detecting predators
- Spiky scales—usually soft—can be tightened into a sharp spines for self-defense
- Can darken their color to absorb heat more efficiently
- Can inflate abdomen to facilitate floating in deep water

Their natural coloration is dull brown or tan with red or gold highlights, depending on local soil color, but modern breeding practices have produced a variety of color morphs from white to lemon yellow to dark red. Modern breeding has also produced different scale textures:

- Duffers (multidirectional scales),
- Leatherbacks (small, smooth scales)
- Microscale (tiny scales, small spikes around head and even smaller along abdomen)
- Silkbacks (no scales)

### 1. Bearded Dragon Shopping List

Although bearded dragons are commonly recommended as an ideal "first pet," please note that even the easiest reptiles can be expensive and high-maintenance to keep. If you are not prepared to purchase everything required for the health and wellbeing of a bearded dragon, this is not the pet for you.

- Appropriately sized Front-opening enclosure
- Basking bulbs (1-2, 75-150W depending on tank and enclosure location)
- Basking Fixture
- Infrared temperature gun
- Digital probe thermometer
- 12+ " piece of slate or stone (basking surface)
- T5 HO 10.0 Desert UVB lamp that is 2/3 length of enclosure
- T5 HO 10.0 Fixture
- digital timer, not necessary but great

- Substrate, tile, rubber mat, paper towels, newspaper (never use carpet and sand is not recommended for beardies under 1 year)
- Hides or caves (1-2+)
- Environmental enrichment: climbing branches, cork logs, rocks, etc.
- Escape proof Food dish
- Calcium supplement, WITH D3
- Multivitamin supplement
- Feeding tongs, unless you like touching bugs
- Feeder insects

Approximate investment before bearded dragon purchase: \$700 USD (Save a LOT of money on shipping costs by buying rocks at your local landscaping or hardware supply store). Keep in mind that all supplies should be purchased and set up BEFORE you get the bearded dragon. This will save you a lot of stress, and does your new pet a big favor, too.

We also recommend finding an experienced reptile veterinarian in your area. It's always better to do a little bit of research when nothing's wrong than to find yourself in a panic when your pet gets sick.

## 2. Terrarium Size

A bearded dragon terrarium needs to be big enough to provide enough space for exercise, as well as to facilitate a proper temperature gradient.

The minimum appropriate enclosure size for an adult bearded dragon is 48" x 24" x 24" .

Although bearded dragons grow rather quickly, it's best to keep them in an enclosure that isn't too big for their size if you free-roam feed your insects. If you put all feeders in an escape proof dish, this isn't as big of a deal as the food will be in one place and easy to locate. If your feeders are roaming for enrichment during mealtime, a baby bearded dragon will do better in a 10-20 gallon enclosure.

## 3. Heating & Lighting Requirements

Bearded dragons are diurnal, which means that they are active during the day. And they LOVE the sun. In fact, their parietal (third) eye uses bright light to set the dragon's circadian rhythm and activity patterns. They must have strong, reliable UVB lighting. Plenty of bright, white light is needed for energy, appetite, and mental health. For maximum effectiveness and safety, the bulb should be roughly 2/3 the length of your enclosure and placed on the same side as your heat lamps. You will also need to be careful about the distance between the basking area and the UVB bulb, as UVB strength actually varies depending on distance from the bulb, and whether it's mounted over or under the mesh top. Like all reptiles, bearded dragons need heat to digest and maintain their immune systems. Without it, they get sick and die. Since bearded dragons are basking lizards, they use heat most effectively from an overhead heat source that mimics the sun. Since they are cold-blooded, bearded dragons need a temperature gradient in their enclosure in order to be able to regulate their body temperature.

Although they can tolerate very high basking temperatures, they need to be able to escape to cooler areas in the enclosure to prevent overheating. For example, if we were looking at an average enclosure from left to right, the highest temperatures should be at the far left, gradually descending to the lowest temperatures on the far right.

- ★ 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)

#### 4. Substrate Options

Rubber Mat or Tile – These substrates retain heat well and are more attractive

Paper Towels or Newspaper – These substrates are cheap, sterile, and make cleaning easy, but they're better for quarantine than for long-term housing.

DO NOT USE: These substrates pose significant health risks to your bearded dragon!

- Sand – leads to impaction if ingested due to presence of calcium carbonate
- Ground nut shell, wood products (bark, shavings) – dusty and causes impaction if accidentally ingested
- Linoleum, Shelf liner/Peel & Stick – produces VOCs
- Reptile carpet – fibrous nature traps and breeds bacteria, can also catch claws and break toes

#### 5. Enclosure Decor & Environmental Enrichment

As you create an indoor habitat for your bearded dragon, keep in mind that Pogona Vitticeps is native to eastern central Australia, where its habitat spans desert and grassland. That being said, there are so many options when it comes to bearded dragon decorations. The most important thing for you to do is: make sure it can accommodate a bearded dragon's temperature, UV, and humidity requirements, make sure it's dragon-safe, and decorate it appropriate for your dragon's exercise and spatial needs.

Good decorations make a terrarium look cool, but they're also important for exercise, mental stimulation, and helping keep your bearded dragon healthy.

- Basking Rock – This is one of the bearded dragon decorations you can't go without, because it helps your beardie find the perfect basking temperature. The cheapest and best option we've found is some simple bricks or pavers from a home improvement store (to build up height or as walls for the basking spot) and a piece of slate on top.
- Hide/Burrow/Cave – Bearded dragons need a place to hide when they want to be left alone. They use their hide when they want to escape the heat, need some extra humidity, are brumating, or simply want a protected place to take a nap.

#### 6. What Do Bearded Dragons Eat?

How often should bearded dragons be fed?

- Hatchlings (0-6 months old): Insects 2x/day, vegetables daily
- Juveniles (6-12 months): Insects 1x/day, vegetables daily
- Adults (12+ months old): Insects 1-2x/week, vegetables daily

To put this in percentages, you're looking at roughly 60-80% protein for hatchlings, 60% for juveniles, and 15-30% for adults.

Staple Vegetables		Occasional Vegetables		Poisonous Vegetables	
Arugula/Rocket	Pea shoots	Artichoke heart	Mint leaves	Avocado	
Bok choy	Fresh green beans	Asparagus	Radicchio	Onion	
Mustard greens	Spring mix	Basil	Spinach	Mushrooms	
Watercress	Turnip greens	Bell pepper	Squash, raw		
		Cilantro	Swiss chard		
		Carrot greens	Thyme		
		Cucumber, peeled	Yam, grated raw		
		Carrot, grated raw	Zucchini		

  

Fruits (treat only, no more than 1x a week)		Staple Proteins		Protein Treats	
Apple	Berries	Black soldier fly larvae	Discoid roaches	Hornworms	
Banana	Figs	Crickets	Mealworms	Silkworms	
Mango	Papaya	Dubia roaches	Red runner roaches	Butterworms	
Melon	Peaches	Grasshoppers	Superworms	Waxworms	
				Pinkies	

To ensure that your beardie is getting all the vitamins and minerals they need, you need to keep two forms of supplementation on hand: calcium powder with D3 and multivitamin powder. Take care not to use these too often; over-supplementation can be just as deadly as under-supplementation. Generously dust feeder insects before feeding. Most people prefer the "shake-and-bake" method of dusting, where you stick all the bugs in a bag or disposable plastic container and shake them until they are evenly coated in powder. Calcium sticks better to some bugs than others, and if you're feeding black soldier fly larvae, you don't need to dust them at all, as they are naturally high in calcium. We highly recommend Arcadia Calcium & MG, D3, Multivitamins, & Shed Support.

## 7. Handling Tips

Set realistic expectations. Through the process of bearded dragon taming and handling, remember that each has its own personality and will act accordingly—no matter what you do. But here are some general guidelines to keep in mind:

- Bearded dragons have claws. Because they have claws, they do scratch bare skin sometimes. It'll leave a red line at first, but that goes away soon enough.
- A stressed, frightened dragon will do anything to get away from you. Making sure that your dragon is well-fed, familiar with its environment, and familiar with you is key for long-term trust. Understand that this takes time and effort.

Think you're ready to slay your dragon? When you first bring your beardie home, resist the temptation to immediately start cuddling him/her. You're huge compared to a bearded dragon, and s/he needs time to figure out you're a friend, not a predator. Most sources recommend letting your dragon settle in for 2 weeks before handling. It's torture, but worth it. Once your beardie has established confidence in his/her new home, you can introduce yourself. Let him/her get comfortable with your scent by placing an old, used shirt in the terrarium. Offer him/her food from your fingers (I recommend dry food like greens; wet stuff like melon or cucumber will get you bitten). Let your hand rest in the terrarium and allow the dragon to familiarize itself with your hand. This may involve quite a bit of licking.

After your bearded dragon has stopped running away from your hand and seems calm in your presence, you can handle him/her. But just because you have reached this step does not mean your dragon trusts you. Trust and friendship (as far as it goes for lizards) takes time and daily handling. Here are some handling pointers.

- Support all four feet. If one foot is left out, s/he will feel off balance and start to thrash to regain it.
- Use slow movements. Large, fast movements remind them of predators. Small, quick movements remind them of prey. Either way, it's distracting.
- Petting is tolerated and even appreciated, but do so gently. Never tug, pull, or tap. Also resist rubbing against his/her scales.
- If your beardie is shedding, resist pulling at the loose skin. You may pull off scales that haven't completely detached yet.

**Ready for Adventure!** Allowing your bearded dragon to roam around gives him/her an opportunity to become completely confident in your home. You can even take him/her outside if the sun is out. This is great exercise, mentally stimulating, and an excellent source of UVB, so give him/her an opportunity to get out whenever possible. Make sure to keep an eye out, though! A lizard leash is a great investment for excursions!

You may be able to prevent your dragon from being stepped on, but part of letting your bearded dragon roam free is becoming proficient at Hide-and-Seek. You can reduce the likelihood of losing him/her by "reptile-proofing" your home and being aware of trouble zones.

- Underneath cabinets, couches, beds, etc.
- Behind the refrigerator
- Clothes/blankets on the floor
- Closets

**Bearded Dragon Body Language** Time for a quick lesson on bearded dragon body language. Becoming fluent takes a little while, but soon you'll be able to read not only general body cues, but the moods specific to your beardie's personality.

- Black/dark beard – Something's not right. It could be pain, cold temperatures, or general irritability. Maybe you took him/her outside and s/he doesn't like it. A dark beard is always a bad thing. But if you have a male and there's a female nearby, he's just showing off.
- Flexed beard – Feeling territorial. Your beardie will expand his/her beard if s/he feels like someone else is getting in his/her personal space. If you have a male and there's a female nearby, he's just showing off again. Beard flexing is also a normal behavior in the morning, as they do it to stretch, especially when shedding.
- "Sexy Leg" – An endearingly cute behavior that is nothing more than a good stretch.
- "Pancaking" – If your bearded dragon suddenly flattens against the ground, spreading out his/her body, s/he is feeling frightened. There may have been a sudden movement that s/he didn't like, or maybe s/he is outside. This is a defensive maneuver dragons use to hide from predators. It also hardens their side spikes.
- Gaping – This is a normal behavior displayed by bearded dragons when they get hot. It's like dogs panting. This is nothing to be concerned about unless s/he is doing it frequently, which means you should reduce temps a bit, or that s/he is sick. A big gape can be a warning that s/he is about to bite.
- Tail up – Your beardie is feeling alert! This is typically displayed while hunting down bugs or adventuring. And it's terribly cute.
- Head bobbing – This is a territorial display, as well as a sign of dominance. Bearded dragons do this to other bearded dragons to tell them who's boss. If a male is doing this to a female, he's trying to impress her. If your bearded dragon is head bobbing but there's no other beardie in sight, s/he's just feeling good.
- Arm waving – This is how a head bob is usually returned. Arm waving is a sign of submission, and is very deliberate, so you can't miss it! If a male is nearby, your female is likely telling him that she is impressed by him. If your beardie is an only child, arm waving may be a sign that s/he submits to you. You can build his/her confidence by waving at him/her. S/he will likely give you a funny look, but do it every once in a while and s/he'll get the message.

## 8. Other Health Info

In the wild, a sick or weakened reptile is a target for predators, so they have become experts at pretending to be well. As pets, this means that any reptile owner must be extra diligent in order to notice changes that may indicate illness.

- Keep a weekly record of weight, feeding habits, behavior, shedding, etc.
- Prepare a reptile first-aid kit so you won't be left scrambling if your dragon becomes sick or injured
- Have an exotic vet saved in your phone
- Bookmark our website, we are always here to help! Plus, we have some great supplies and amazing decor available.

**Thank you for your purchase and good luck  
on your journey!! Have a Blessed day!**