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## Bearded Dragons

### Natural History

Australian Bearded Dragons (*Pogona* Sp.) are old world agamids. They get their name from their spiny throat and the ability to display it when threatened. The main bearded dragon on the pet trade is the Inland Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*). Other species less common are Lawson's dragon (*Pogona henrylawsoni*) and common bearded dragon (*Pogona barbata*).

Male bearded dragons are easy sexed when they reach sexual maturity as they have a large head, femoral pores and cloacal slit when compared to mature females. Immature bearded dragons are more challenging to sex. Subtleties such as head size are helpful but not fool proof. Both mature females and immature females or males may exhibit the forearm wave, which is a submissive behavior to a more dominant lizard.

### Caging

Young bearded dragons should be reared individually for many reasons. Ten to fifteen gallon tanks work well for babies under 4 months. Eating, drinking, and stool output can be closely monitored for each individual. Kept together, babies can inflict serious injuries to each other's tails and limbs. Adults can be kept singly or in pairs depending on the amount of space available and the temperament of each lizard. The bigger the cage, the better. Fifty five gallon tanks, horse watering troughs, or homemade equivalents are adequate for two lizards. Two males cannot be kept in close quarters.

Though some use sand as the floor substrate, we recommend alfalfa pellets, cypress mulch, indoor/outdoor carpet or newspaper. Young lizards mildly deficient in calcium tend to over-eat the sand in the cage causing impactions, slow growth, and poor health. No matter the substrate used, it should be routinely cleaned at least weekly to prevent bacteria and parasite overpopulation.

### Lighting

The most efficient light source is the Exo Terra Solar Glo. It is a mercury vapor bulb that emits heat, UVB, and UVA. UV light has multiple benefits including calcium metabolism and improved appetite and activity. Proper calcium metabolism helps protect against metabolic bone disease. Carefully follow the bulb manufacturer's directions for installation. Use a clamp lamp with a ceramic fixture to prevent melting. The fixture should be carefully secured to avoid being bumped and breaking the filament or starting a fire. Make sure to replace the bulb yearly and remember that glass and plastic blocks UV light. If needed, a red bulb can be added for nighttime temperature drops.

### Temperature

Daytime temperatures of 85 degrees F should be reached with a basking area of 90-95 degrees F.

This temperature can be achieved by using the Solar Glo bulb, infrared heat emitters, under tank heating pads or heat tape. The more successful bearded dragon breeders set up tanks which have thermal gradients whereby basking spots are 95 degrees F and the cooler spots are 80-85 degrees F. Night time temperatures should not drop below 70 degrees F.

## **Feeding and Watering**

Bearded dragons are omnivorous, meaning they will eat vegetables and animal matter. Various appropriately sized insects, such as crickets or roaches, can be fed every other day. Vegetable matter should be given on alternate days. Collard, mustard, turnip, and dandelion greens are excellent sources of vitamin D3 and calcium. Frozen (thawed) or fresh mixed veggies should complement the greens in approximately equal proportions. The veggies should be cut in proportionate sizes to the dragon.

Calcium is very important for growing babies and egg-laying females. Babies should have their insects dusted at each feeding. It is a good idea to feed hatchlings 2-3 times daily with 2-4 crickets and once with veggies. Insects must be appropriately sized (approximately no larger than half the width of the head). Never feed mealworms to babies as they will vomit up the exoskeleton and become rapidly dehydrated. NEVER FEED SCORPIONS to your bearded dragon. They are toxic and will result in death. Feeding high quality vegetables and gut loaded crickets/insects will decrease the need to supplement with calcium. With good UVB lighting or outside enclosures a pure calcium supplement such as crushed cherry TUMS is adequate.

Baby bearded dragons do best if they are watered or misted twice daily. Misting the side of the tank or dripping water in a shallow dish often stimulates them to drink. Dripping water on their head or making a water meniscus also works to stimulate drinking. Older beard dragons drink less as they get most of their water from their vegetables.

### **Common Medical Problems:**

Spastic paralysis (stiff hind limbs)

Vomiting

Coccidia -parasites

Flagylated parasites

Metabolic bone disease

Mate aggression

Fatty liver disease-obesity