**Aquatic Turtle Care Sheet**



**Basic Information**

Lifespan: 20–40 years

Adult Size: 5-13 inches depending on species

Behavior: Semi-aquatic, basking turtles

Activity Level: Diurnal (active during the day)

**Enclosure Setup**

Tank Size

* Hatchlings: Minimum 20–40 gallons to start (they grow quickly!) Most aquatic turtles will outgrow commercial fishtanks and require custom tanks or outdoor enclosures.

Water Depth

* Provide at least 1.5–2x the turtle’s shell length in water depth
* Ensure easy access to basking areas via a ramp, dock, or rock pile.

**Temperature & Heating**

Water temperature:

* Hatchlings: 78–80°F
* Adults: 74–78°F
* Basking area: 88–95°F
* Use a submersible heater (with guard) for water and basking lamp above the platform
* Night temperatures can drop to 70°F, but avoid drastic changes as they can lead to respiratory infections and other illnesses.

Lighting:

* UVB lighting is essential (10–12 hours/day) for calcium metabolism and shell health
* Use a 5.0 UVB bulb and replace every 6–8 months
* Position basking lamp and UVB over the dry dock, not the water

**Water Quality**

* Powerful canister or submersible filter recommended (turtles are messy)
* Partial water changes weekly (25–50%)
* Dechlorinate tap water
* Maintain pH around 6.5–8.0

**Basking Area & Land**

* Create a dry basking dock using floating platforms, turtle docks, cork bark, or custom ramps
* Must support the turtle’s weight and allow them to fully dry off
* Position heat/UVB light overhead

**Diet & Nutrition**

* Commercial turtle pellets (e.g., Mazuri, ReptoMin, Zoomed)
* Protein (2–3x/week): earthworms, crickets, shrimp, feeder fish (occasionally)
* Vegetables (daily): dark leafy greens (collard, dandelion, romaine), duckweed, aquatic plants

Supplements:

* Offer calcium (with D3) regularly
* Cuttlebone in the tank is a great calcium source

Feeding Schedule:

* Juveniles: Daily
* Adults: Every other day
* Remove uneaten food to prevent water fouling

**Cleaning**

* Use a gravel vacuum or siphon for cleaning
* Spot clean solid waste daily
* Deep clean tank & filter monthly

**What to Avoid**

* No gravel or small stones (choking hazard)
* No glass heaters without a guard
* No overcrowding – leads to stress and disease
* Avoid feeding only meat or iceberg lettuce
* Never release pet turtles into the wild

**Common Health Issues**

* Shell rot: From dirty water or poor basking
* Vitamin A deficiency: Puffy eyes, poor appetite (fix with diet)
* Respiratory infection: Lethargy, wheezing, tilted swimming (requires vet care)
* Metabolic bone disease (MBD): From lack of UVB or calcium

**Vet Care:** If you notice your turtle is lethargic, not eating, losing weight, struggling to move or breathe, consider reaching out to any of the following vets:

* Exotic Bird Hospital on Beach Blvd. (904) 256-0043
* Riverside Animal Hospital Downtown (904) 388-3494
* Birch Island Veterinary Center on Philips Hwy. (904) 717-6840
* Forever Vets Animal Hospital on Bartram Market Dr. (904) 490-8228