Tortoise Care Sheet



*Sulcata Tortoise:*

Adult Size: 2-3ft, 80-120lbs Lifespan: 50-70 years

*Redfoot Tortoise:*

Adult Size: 10-18 inches Lifespan: 50-70 years

# *Enclosure and Habitat*

## Indoor Enclosures

* Size: A minimum of a 40-gallon enclosure is required to start for a baby tortoise.
* Substrate: Use a mixture of organic topsoil and play sand, or cypress mulch. Avoid pine or cedar shavings as they can be toxic.
* Lighting: Tortoises need 12-14 hours of light daily. Use a UVB bulb (10.0 strength for most species) to help produce vitamin D3, vital for calcium absorption. Your UVB bulb will need to be replaced every 6-8 months to ensure it is still emitting proper rays.
* Heating: Create a temperature gradient by placing the heat lamp on one side of the enclosure. The basking area should reach 90-100°F, while the cool side should be around 70-75°F. Avoid letting the temperature drop below 70°F since baby tortoises are very sensitive to extreme changes in temperature.
* A humid hide can be helpful

## Outdoor Enclosures

* Security: Use sturdy walls (at least 12 inches above ground, and bury 8-12 inches below to prevent digging escapes).
* Shelter: Provide a weatherproof hide from rain, sun, and predators.
* Plants: Include edible weeds and grasses; avoid toxic plants (e.g., foxglove, oleander, buttercup).
* Sunlight: Natural sunlight is the best UVB source. Ensure part of the enclosure is shaded to prevent overheating.

# *Diet and Nutrition*

* Staple Greens: Offer dandelion greens, collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, any of the hardier greens work best. Avoid spinach and iceberg lettuce. Rotate varieties to ensure a balanced diet.
* Grasses and Hay: Many species, especially Sulcatas, need fibrous grasses and hay as staple foods. Tortoise hay is a great addition to their diet.
* Vegetables: Limited amounts of carrot, squash, pumpkin, and bell peppers can be offered occasionally.
* Fruits: Feed fruits like strawberries, melon, or mango sparingly to Mediterranean species; Red-footed tortoises can have a bit more due to their natural diet.
* Supplements: Dust food with calcium powder 2-3 times a week, calcium powder helps their bones and shell grow properly. A reptile multivitamin can be offered once a week.
* Water: Provide fresh, clean water daily in a shallow heavy bowl. Tortoises should be soaked weekly (more often for young tortoises) in lukewarm water for hydration.

Care and maintenance

* Your tortoise should be soaked in lukewarm water up to its neck 1-2 times a week for 10-20 minutes. This will help keep their shell clean and hydrated and make sure they drink enough water.
* Remove any poop from the enclosure as you notice it, tortoises poop frequently so a deep clean of the enclosure should take place every 3-4 months.

# *Handling and Socialization*

Limit handling to reduce stress; always support the body fully and avoid dropping. However, a good way to interact with your tortoise is to handfeed them greens and let them take supervised walks around your floor. Wash hands before and after handling to reduce risk of spreading bacteria (like Salmonella).

# *Health and Well-being*

## Common Health Issues

* Shell Rot: Caused by bacterial or fungal infections. Prevent by keeping enclosure clean and dry.
* Respiratory Infections: Symptoms include wheezing, runny nose, or lethargy. Check for drafts and maintain proper humidity and temperature.
* Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD): Results from calcium deficiency or lack of UVB. Prevent with correct diet and lighting.
* Parasites: Regular fecal checks with a reptile veterinarian can catch this.

## Veterinary Care

If you notice your tortoise experiencing any of these symptoms, 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