



BEARDED DRAGON

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) is native to the rocky desert regions of central Australia. In the wild they are in a very hot, arid environment. They are skilled climbers and are often found sunbathing on fence posts. They forage during the day for food, but like most desert animals they spend the hottest parts of the day hiding. Bearded dragons and other reptiles are commonly incorrectly labeled as “cold-blooded” which implies they are in a never-ending struggle to stay warm. These animals are ectotherms, meaning they rely on environmental heat to regulate their body temperature. The average life span is 8-10 years and adult bearded dragons can range in size from 17 to 24 inches.



It is **crucial** to maintain an appropriate diet, proper lighting and temperature gradient for reptiles, as incorrect husbandry is the most common cause of illness. **90% of reptile medical cases are due to improper husbandry.**

Diet: Invertebrates (80%) and dark leafy greens (20%)

Appropriate prey items: Gut-loaded crickets*, dubia roaches, silkworms, black soldier fly larvae (“Phoenix worms”), and hornworms.

Never offer mealworms, waxworms, butterworms, or superworms.**

Appropriate vegetables and greens: Kale, parsley, collard, turnip, dandelion and mustard greens, bok choy, swiss chard, squash, carrot.

Temperature: Hot end: 90-100°F Cool end: No less than 80-85°F

Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs (they emit heat but no light). Keep a thermometer at basking level on the hot end of the enclosure, and at ground level on the cool end. Never use heat rocks or heating pads, as they can cause severe burns.

UVB: Reptiles require a specific wavelength of light called UVB. This substitutes natural sunlight in the captive enclosure.

Their bodies are unable to properly absorb calcium without UVB. A lack of UVB lighting will cause severe health problems.

* Crickets should be gut-loaded (fed) with T-Rex Calcium Plus. This is the only gut-loading formula that has been proven in studies to supply adequate calcium to reptiles. Never use calcium dust; this cannot be effectively broken down and absorbed by the body. It can also cause bladder stones in some reptiles.

** Mealworms, waxworms, butterworms, and superworms do not provide the nutrition that reptiles need. They are reptile “junk food”. They are very high in fat and their calcium/phosphorus ratio is steeply inverted. This causes calcium deficiency, as phosphorus inactivates calcium. High phosphorus levels can also cause kidney damage.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT DIET & HUSBANDRY

If your bearded dragon is picky, we recommend finely chopping the greens along with preferred food items (such as squash or carrot). They will get a mouthful of greens when they go for their preferred food. Bearded dragons can also be occasionally offered a variety of berries as a treat. They particularly seem to enjoy blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries.

High-quality feeder insects can be ordered online and shipped directly to your home. We recommend:

Oregonsilkworms.com

Joshsfrogs.com

Rainbowmealworms.net

Amazon.com

ENVIRONMENT

Bearded dragons should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide. An adult bearded dragon should not be kept in an enclosure smaller than 40 gallons (36" x 18" x 16").

UVB Lighting: We recommend using a full-spectrum bulb, the **Reptisun 5.0 or 10.0, manufactured by ZooMed**. Leave UVB bulbs on for 14 hours a day, and make sure that the bulb is not filtered through glass or plastic. These bulbs must be changed every 6 months because their effectiveness as a UVB emitter decreases over time.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs and leave these on 24/7 to maintain appropriate temperatures. Avoid red heat lamps. Studies have shown reptiles have the ability to see red light, and this will interfere with the photoperiod.

Moisture: Wild bearded dragons live in arid desert environments. Misting is not required. A large dish with fresh water should be accessible at all times. Bearded dragons should also be soaked in shallow, warm water for 15-20 minutes 2-3 times weekly. This helps them defecate and maintain hydration.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Coconut fiber is also okay if it is allowed to dry completely after the initial wetting. Avoid all types of sand, including Calci Sand. Sand can be ingested, causing blockage in the intestines.

Furniture: Provide branches, hammocks, etc. for climbing and dark areas for hiding.

MEDICAL CARE

Bring bearded dragons in once a year for an annual health check. Bloodwork is recommended annually to check on the function of the internal organs, signs of inflammation, anemia, and infection. Every bearded dragon should have a fecal test to check for internal parasites.

Common Illnesses:

- a) **Parasitic Infections:** Symptoms include: loss of appetite, inability to gain weight, and slow growth. Diagnosis is by performing a fecal test to check for parasites. Treatment includes administering an oral anti-parasitic medication and repeating fecal tests.
- b) **Impaction (Intestinal Blockage):** This condition is almost always caused by the ingestion of foreign objects or sand. Symptoms include: loss of appetite and inability to produce stools. Bearded dragons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away. Treatment can be difficult and often requires hospitalization. Avoiding the use of sand can prevent this problem!
- c) **Nutritional Secondary Hyperparathyroidism (Metabolic Bone Disease):** This condition is caused by improper nutrition and lack of UVB lighting. Symptoms include: limb and jaw deformities, muscle twitching, lethargy, lack of appetite, and difficulty eating. Bearded dragons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Bring your bearded dragon to a veterinarian right away if it is showing any of the following symptoms:

Loss of appetite

Diarrhea or inability to pass stool

Difficulty breathing

Weight loss

Extreme lethargy