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Bearded Dragon Husbandry

HOUSING

A single adult bearded dragon should be housed in a glass/plastic enclosure that is at least 72 inches long by 16 inches wide by 17 inches high. A minimum of 10-20 gallon aquarium is necessary for juveniles. Newspaper or paper pulp material (Carefresh) is recommended as a substrate as it is easily cleaned and will not cause gastrointestinal problems if eaten. You can also use indoor/outdoor carpeting. Sand should not be used because can cause eye damage, intestinal impactions, and poor shedding and is not a good source of calcium (if using certain products). Bearded dragons like to climb and bask in branches, driftwood and cork bark. Daytime basking temperatures need to range from 85-95°F with the ambient temperature 75-80°F. Night time temperature should range from 60-70 F. Provide 12-14 hours of full spectrum light including ultraviolet B (UVb) in the summer and 10-12 hours in the winter. UVb light is necessary for the absorption of calcium from the gastrointestinal system. Straight fluorescent tubes should be changed every six months. If using a mercury vapor bulb to provide UVb and heat these bulbs need to be changed less often. Active Heat by T-Rex and PowerSun by Zoomed is the mercury vapor bulb recommended. Soaking your bearded dragon daily in a warm water bath for 15-20 minutes daily will help ensure hydration and proper shedding. Misting the enclosure will also help maintain the proper humidity and aid in hydration and proper shedding.

FEEDING ADULTS

- Adults are primarily herbivores (plant eaters) and should be fed a variety of dark leafy vegetables rich in calcium such as collard greens, mustard greens, or dandelion greens. Spinach and kale can be feed in small portions because oxalates in the plant can limit calcium absorption. Parsley and broccoli (leaves and florets) are also high in calcium.
- Limited amounts of other vegetables such as shredded carrots and sweet potato, squash, peas and beans can be offered.
- Chop or shred the greens and place them in a bowl or on a plate and spray with water prior to feeding in order to increase water consumption.
- A calcium supplement can be dusted on top of the salad.
- Offer gut-loaded insects two to three times per week; see the cricket care guide.
- Dust insects with a calcium/Vitamin D3 supplement twice weekly and every other week with a multivitamin that includes Vitamin A.
- Pinkie or fuzzy mice can be as occasional treats
- Commercial bearded dragon diets (moistened with water) can be offered, but should not make up more than 50% of the diet. If they are readily eaten it is important to reduce other vitamin and mineral supplementation.

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FEEDING JUVENILES

- Juveniles are omnivorous (eating approximately 50% animal material). A variety of leafy green vegetables as described for adults and appropriately sized crickets (no longer than the width of the dragons head) should be offered twice per day.
- Dust crickets with a calcium/vitamin D3 supplement four to five times a week and a multivitamin with Vitamin A once a week.
- Placing too many insects in the enclosure at once can make it difficult to know if the young dragons are eating and can be stressful if the insects crawl all over them.
- Up to 50% of the diet can be moistened, juvenile commercial bearded dragon food but it is important to reduce other vitamin and mineral supplementation if it is being readily eaten.

VETERINARY CARE

Getting your bearded dragon examined yearly is important to maintaining good health. Gastrointestinal parasites (coccidian, pinworms and flagellates) are extremely common in bearded dragons. A fecal examination should be performed on all dragons and if necessary appropriate anti-parasitic treatment should be prescribed by a veterinarian. It is important to note any subtle signs of illness in reptiles, including bearded dragons, because they can be early signs of metabolic bone disease, reproductive problems, infections or skin disease. With early intervention and prompt veterinary care many of these problems can be fixed. If you would like to schedule an appointment, call our office at 240-687-1414.

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