



CARE OF BOX TURTLES

Our Turtle & Tortoise Care Sheets are meant as a general guideline to caring for your Turtle/Tortoise. Every specific species requires its own unique care - while many species are overlapping and can be kept with other species that have similar needs.

For even more details about the needs of a specific species - or for ideas about which different species will go well together (many do), please contact us by phone or email. Thank you!

GENERAL

North American box turtles are found in great variety. There is a range of sizes, shell patterns, and habitats from aquatic to arid. This small, alert, and intelligent turtle has a passionate and diverse following of turtle keepers.

DISTRIBUTION

There are four species and a dozen subspecies of Terrapene from Maine and Michigan south to Mexico

SIZE

Most Box turtle species can reach 6 inches as adults. Gulf Coast Box turtles and Florida Box turtles are a bit larger than this, reaching 7-8 inches.

ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE

Hatchling box turtles are initially very delicate and sensitive to their captive environment. Most, even desert-dwelling species require humid enclosures. We have had success keeping desert species, forest species, and marsh species in a 20-gallon long aquarium with a shallow (1") depth of clean, chlorine-free water and live plants. We add heat from below with a heating pad on the low setting and we add a 40-watt or 60-watt incandescent bulb in a clamp-type fixture above a warmer basking area. UVB-emitting bulbs in an aquarium fixture or a shop light fixture are placed above the enclosure. We add several shelters such as plastic shelters, piles of leaves, and cork bark. Soon after hatching they begin to feed eagerly on live food such as redworms, blackworms, and small crickets. We believe that baby box turtles grow well if fed small amounts of this variety of food each day. Be sure to add calcium with D3 and vitamin powder to their meals every few feedings.



DIET

Box turtles are omnivores and feed on a huge variety of food in the wild. In captivity, they are especially fond of live food such as earthworms, redworms, wax worms, crickets, pink mice, and even goldfish. They will eat MAZURI® Tortoise Diet and high-quality canned cat food (beef, chicken, turkey, etc.), but this should only be a small part of their overall diet and many keepers choose not to feed cat food as it is high in fat and protein which can lead to obesity and shell deformities. At the TTPG, our box turtles will eat earthworms, superworms, MAZURI® Tortoise Diet, soaked Zupreme Monkey Biscuits®, and chopped fruits in addition to the large variety of live foods listed above. Finely grated veggies with dark green lettuces, kale, and fruits such as melons, berries, cantaloupe, are also accepted (though not eagerly) once or twice a week.

HEALTH

Common Health Problems: Box turtles from arid environments are susceptible to respiratory infections if kept too cool, and especially cool and humid. Mild cases can be corrected by changing the turtle's environment to one that is warm (85 to 90 F) and dry (below 20% humidity). Care should be taken to correct the environment quite quickly, before the respiratory conditions worsen. More severe cases of respiratory problems (pneumonia) may require antibiotic treatment by a veterinarian.

Captive box turtles kept in incorrect conditions often exhibit eye-related problems. Usually, this is a sign of nutritional deficiencies such as a lack of vitamin A in their diets. This problem can be corrected by adding a good high-quality vitamin supplement to the box turtles' food every 3-4 feedings. We use Rep-Cal Calcium with Vitamin D3® and Rep-Cal Herptivite® mixed in a 2 to 1 ratio. This mix is dusted onto salads and is even sprinkled on earthworms every few times they are offered. Also, offering box turtles a secure outside environment with plenty of direct sunlight helps immensely.

Wild-caught box turtles are occasionally infected with the larvae of parasitic flies such as the bot fly. These larvae should be removed by a qualified veterinarian immediately. In addition to parasites, injury, and stress are often exhibited by wild-caught turtles – searching out captive-hatched box turtles is your best bet. It shows support for a turtle breeder's work and will provide you with a healthy well-acclimated pet.

Interestingly, female box turtles have been known to store sperm and produce viable eggs for up to four years after copulation (Ewing, 1943 and de Vosjoli & Klingenberg, 1995).



RECOMMENDED READING

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