



CARE OF LEOPARD TORTOISE

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

Leopard Tortoises are beautiful black and yellow tortoises with intricate spotted patterns on their shells.

DISTRIBUTION

Leopard Tortoises are found in hot, dry scrubland areas in southern Africa. They live in the underbrush, seeking refuge from the heat under brushy plants and other shady areas. They browse grass and plant growth.

SIZE

Leopard Tortoises grow quite large, with many adults reaching 14 inches to 16 inches. Large females of *G. p. pardalis* can reach 18 inches to 20 inches and 40 to 60 pounds, but captive specimens this large are rare.

ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE

The most common form of indoor accommodation for small or medium sized Leopard Tortoises is a large terrarium. Keepers can use plastic tubs, wooden cages, and other enclosures, but glass terrariums are easy to find at the local pet store and they come in a variety of sizes. Of course, as the tortoise grows, it will need larger and larger enclosures. A pair of adult Leopard Tortoises will require an enclosure that is at least 4' wide x 6' long.

The substrate for Leopards can be a mixture of $\frac{3}{4}$ sand and $\frac{1}{4}$ peat moss. A layer of grass hay can be added at one end to provide some shelter. The substrate should be kept dry as Leopard Tortoises are very sensitive to damp conditions.



Heat and Lighting: Heat should be provided using a heat-emitting bulb in a lamp from overhead. Ideally, this heat lamp should hang just about 12 inches above the substrate. The heat-emitting bulb should provide a basking spot of 90° to 95° F (32° to 35° C) at one end of the enclosure. This will provide a hot end for the tortoise to enjoy. Most keepers will also place a shop light fixture overhead that is fitted with one or two UV-emitting bulbs. These can be found at your pet store or on-line from a variety of sources. UVB-heat bulbs® from T-Rex products and Reptisun® bulbs from Zoomed will also provide UV radiation to the enclosure. This UVB is necessary for Vitamin D3 production (needed for calcium absorption, proper muscle functioning, etc.).

DIET

Leopard Tortoises should be fed a diet that is very high in fiber. They will feed eagerly on a mixed salad of greens and vegetables each day, but a keeper should try to offer as much grass, hay, dandelions, leaves, and Opuntia cactus pads as possible. A sprinkle of calcium should be offered on the salad every few times. For optimal health, they should be fed fruits only sparingly or not at all. We offer our Leopards some melon, apple, and other fruits during the hot summers, but only once every ten days to two weeks. Leopard Tortoises should not be fed any dog food or cat food and commercial foods only very seldom as they are prone to renal problems and medical issues related to high protein diets.

Water: Water should be offered in a flat saucer. This can be a flat dish or a plastic saucer which is normally placed under a plant pot. These can be easily cleaned and sterilized once a week or as needed.

HEALTH

Leopard Tortoises require warm, dry environments and so keepers living in humid areas should be very careful about keeping Leopard Tortoises outdoors. Living on the damp ground will cause serious medical problems with Leopard Tortoises.

As with sulcatas, Leopard Tortoises are found in hot, dry habitat. Thus, their captive enclosures should reflect this need. When kept cool or damp for an extended period of time, a keeper can expect a Leopard Tortoise to begin showing respiratory problems. The early signs are puffy eyes, runny noses, etc. A keeper should strive to maintain an enclosure that is hot and dry to avoid these health issues. As Leopard Tortoises are really only available as captive-hatched babies these days, a keeper should not be concerned about internal parasites unless a baby has been kept in the enclosure with wild-caught adults or wild-caught tortoises of another species (A HUGE MISTAKE!). Long-term lack of appetite, runny or smelly stools, and blood in the feces are signs of a problem and a keeper should approach a qualified veterinarian if any of these signs are noticed.



RECOMMENDED READING

- Corton, M. 2000. A Beginner's Guide to Leopard and Other South African Tortoises. Carapace Press. England.
- de Vosjoli, P. 1996. The General Care and Maintenance of Popular Tortoises. Advanced Vivarium Systems. Lakeside, CA.
- Gurley, R. 2005. SULCATAS In Captivity (with notes on other popular tortoises). ECO publishing, Lansing, MI.
- Highfield, A. 1996. Practical Encyclopedia of Keeping and Breeding Tortoises and Freshwater Tortoises. Carapace Press. England.
- Paull, R.C. and L. Palika. 1999. Leopard Tortoise Guide. Green Nature Books. Homestead, FL.
- Pritchard, P.C.H. 1979. Encyclopedia of Turtles. T.F.H. Publications, Inc. Neptune, NJ.