



# CARE OF MUD AND MUSK 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**

Most mud and musk turtles are small, hardy, and inquisitive, making them some of the best turtles to keep indoors. A large aquarium with a pair of musk turtles, good filtration, and plenty of driftwood and aquatic plants makes an ideal turtle display.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

There are nineteen species of mud and musk turtles ranging from the northeastern United States and south to Central and South America.

## **SIZE**

Most musk turtle hatchlings are very small. These small babies, however, are great feeders and are very hardy. Offer them an enclosure with water that is filtered and warmed to the 74-78° F (23-26° C) range. They need to be able to climb out of the water to bask, so keep the water level low (3-4 inches), offer them plenty of decorations, and place UVB-emitting bulbs over them. The decorations should provide them underwater exploration sites and also break the surface of the water to offer a good basking site. A spotlight with a low-wattage bulb (40-watt or 60-watt) should be placed over the most accessible basking spot. This basking spot should reach 85° F (29° C) during the hottest part of the turtle's afternoon. Young musk and mud turtles will feed on a variety of food. They love guppies and mosquito larvae and will feed on blackworms and small redworms and will soon begin taking a variety of commercial pelleted food.

Most remain small, with Common Musk Turtles (Stinkpots) reaching only 4 inches. Most of the Central American species reach 6-7 inches and the very aggressive Giant Musk Turtle (*Staurotypus triporcatus*) can grow to 15 inches.



## **ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE**

Musk turtles make great display animals in aquariums. They cruise along the underwater scenery and hang onto ledges and branches like miniature mountain climbers. They do need to bask so make sure some of their tank's decorations break the surface of the water. Large slabs of slate and driftwood logs have proven to be very effective basking spots.

Many species of musk turtles are found in spring-fed streams. Therefore, most mud and musk turtles will thrive in water that is soft, clean, oxygenated and with plenty of underwater decorations. Water temperature is best kept at 76-78° F (24-26° C) with a decrease in winter and an increase in the spring to stimulate breeding.

The larger species (*Kinosternon scorpioides*, *Staurotypus triporcatus*, *S. salvini*, etc.) will enjoy a deeper setup. To dissuade aggression in these larger species, we add lots of hiding places such as sections of clay or PVC pipe to give the smaller turtles, females uninterested in breeding, and subordinate males a place to escape.

Both indoors and outdoors, mud and musk turtles can be kept successfully with other species as a clean-up crew for fallen food. Use PVC pipes, driftwood, and rock piles to keep combative males away from each other or even better, set up small groups of one male and two or three females per enclosure. They will feed on most types of food and will usually climb up and lay their eggs alongside the other turtles of the enclosure.

## **DIET**

Mud and musk turtles eat commercial aquatic turtle diets well, but need some fish and invertebrates in their diet. They are especially fond of snails, guppies, minnows (shiners), earthworms, and redworms.

## **HEALTH**

Like all basking turtles, mud and musk turtles are susceptible to vitamin A and D3 deficiencies. Be sure to offer them a variety of food. For those not given access to direct sunlight, make sure their food contains the proper amount and ratio (2:1) of calcium and vitamins and to have UVB-emitting bulbs overhead.

Those species naturally found in clear, oxygenated streams, often exhibit eye and skin problems if kept in unclean water. Pinkish skin, a pinkish plastron, and puffy skin or eyes are signs that the water quality is poor. Direct sunlight and warm, clean, aerated water will resolve most minor health issues.



## **Common Musk or Stinkpot Musk Turtles**

Stinkpot Musk Turtle (*Kinosternon odoratus*) – From New England to Florida and Wisconsin, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. 5 inches (12 cm) Babies from 2.2 to 2.9 grams (Tiedemann, pers. com.) These turtles bask high above the water in nature, dropping as much as 18 inches down to the water below when disturbed.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

- Christianson, J. L. and A. E. Dunham. 1972. Reproduction of the Yellow Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon flavescens flavescens*) in New Mexico. *Herpetologica* 28: 130-137.
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