



# CARE OF PAINTED 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**

Painted turtles are similar in behavior to the sliders and cooters. They make fine community turtles and get along very well with Map turtles, Sliders, Cooters, and Red Bellies. Southern Painted Turtles are less cold tolerant, all the painted turtles make wonderful pets as they are small, hardy, and become quite tame in captivity.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

Painted turtles are widespread throughout the United States from Canada to Mexico.

## **SIZE**

Adult females range from 6-7 inches with adult males considerably smaller (5-6 inches).

## **ENVIRONMENT & ENCLOSURE**

Hatchlings thrive in a warm environment with clean, filtered water and live plants, both floating and submerged. Their enclosure should be similar to that described for the Sliders but additional live plants can be added to keep these turtles feeling a bit more secure. They will feed on a wide variety of insects, insect larvae, and fish. Adult Painted turtles do very well in outdoor ponds. They are alert and active year-round. They are sun worshippers, so add plenty of branches and rock piles for them to climb out and bask. Also a lot of aquatic vegetation seems to keep these turtles happy. The northern specimens will hibernate, so care must be taken that they have a planned terrestrial hibernation site with piles of leaves, mulch, and hay. Southern Painted Turtles are less cold tolerant and they may become so slow-moving that they drown if they are caught outside and get too cold in deeper water.



For an indoor setup during the winter (or full time), a basic setup with a large tub will be sufficient to hold three or four adult painted turtles. Add an efficient filtration system, a shop light fixture with UVB-emitting bulbs, and basking spot with a spotlight mounted above that provides basking surface temperatures in the 90s. For these warmth-loving turtles, we often add a submersible heater to raise the water temperature a few extra degrees and maintain the water at 76° to 80° F.

## **DIET**

Painted turtles are omnivores. In the wild, they feed on fish, crayfish, tadpoles, a variety of aquatic invertebrates and a wide range of aquatic plants including duckweed and watercress (Cohen, 1992). Young painted turtles are carnivorous, eagerly consuming fish, worms, crickets, and floating turtle food. As they grow, they become more herbivorous and adults seem to enjoy water lettuce, water hyacinth, and duckweed in addition to romaine lettuce, kale, and other greens. Respect their need for a healthy and varied diet as painted turtles are prone to nutritional problems and shell defects due to insufficient diets. We successfully maintain our Painted turtles on a diet of romaine lettuce, a good, pelleted water turtle diet, a weekly supplement of cut fish, and occasionally earth worms.

## **Southern Painted Turtles**

The Southern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta dorsalis*) is the smallest and probably the most attractive of the painted turtles. It is found in Illinois, Alabama, and along the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. It reaches 4-5 inches and has a dark green carapace with an orange stripe down the top. It also has some beautiful markings along the marginals and a beautiful plastron pronouncing these wonderful turtles as truly being the "painted turtle."

## **Western Painted Turtles**

The Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta belli*) is found from Canada and the northwestern United States south to Wisconsin, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, and Arizona. This species is the largest painted turtle reaching 7-8 inches as adults. They have a beautiful green carapace full of yellow to yellow-orange reticulations and a reddish plastron. They lay 10-12 eggs in the late Spring or early Summer and in the colder portions of its range, the babies are known to overwinter inside the nest.



## **Eastern Painted Turtles**

Eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*) is small, reaching only 5-6 inches. It is very cold tolerant, having been observed active under ice (Pritchard, 1979). As with the other painted turtles, the Eastern Painted Turtle moves from a carnivorous lifestyle as a young turtle to omnivorous as an adult.

## **Midland Painted Turtles**

The Midland Painted Turtle, *Chrysemys picta marginata*, is found from the Great Lakes of Canada south to Illinois, Tennessee, and Alabama. It reaches an adult size of only 5-6 inches. Female Midland Painted Turtles lay 3-7 eggs in the Spring or early Summer.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

- Cohen, M. 1992. The Painted Turtle, *Chrysemys picta*. Tortuga Gazette 28(10): 1-3.
- Ernst, C. H., J. E. Lovich, and R. W. Barbour. 1994. Turtles of the United States and Canada, Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gurley, R. 2003. Keeping and Breeding Freshwater Turtles. Living Art publishing. Ada, Oklahoma.
- Gurley, R. 2005. Turtles in Captivity. ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution. Lansing, Michigan.
- Pritchard, P. 1979. Encyclopedia of Turtles. TFH, Inc. Neptune, New Jersey.
- Vosjoli, P. de 1992. The General Care and Maintenance of Red-eared Sliders and Other Popular Freshwater Turtles. Advanced Vivarium Systems, California.