

Bearded Dragons Care Sheet

Introduction: These gentle beasts are from Australia but are now readily available due to their willingness to breed in captivity. Bearded Dragons make a wonderful pet for both beginners and advanced reptile keepers. Due to their docile nature and relatively small size (usually 16-20 inches) they have become quite popular in recent years. These beautiful creatures are highly recommended for families with small children also due to their seeming love for attention. Life span on average is 10 years in captivity.

Housing: Young Beardies under 10 inches in length can be housed in a 20gal long aquarium. This will last them for a few months only as they grow quickly. Adult Dragons should be housed in nothing smaller than a 40gal tank, preferably a breeder tank so there is more surface area. 55gal aquariums are even more ideal due to the extra length it gives them to run. They are easily found at most pet stores. Screen lids should be used for the top of any aquarium style cages you use. Do not use glass, plexiglass or wood to cover your cages. This will not allow enough air circulation and will also trap humidity in the cage. Screen tops allow air flow, allow your lighting and heat sources to work correctly and also allow humidity to escape.

Lighting: Bearded Dragons require full-spectrum UV lighting for 12-14 hours a day. These fluorescent bulbs should stretch the length of your enclosure and your dragon should be able to come within 6-8 inches of the light. The UV light should be placed over the cage and **not directed through the glass** as glass will deflect the UV rays. Despite what the expiration date is on the box, it is recommended the UV lights be replaced every 6 months. After 6 months, the lights gradually emit less and less UV light.

Heating and Temperature: To produce heat and a basking spot in your enclosure, you can use either a ceramic heat emitter, a reptile basking light (red, blue or white) or just a plain old household lightbulb. The best fixture for any of these choices is a porcelain dome light fixture. This type of fixture is a must with a ceramic heat emitter due to the amount of heat they produce. The temperature for this basking spot you created should be around 95 degrees for adult dragons and 110 for juveniles. Although I don't recommend any temps above 110f, within a few degrees of these basking temps will be sufficient.

The cool side of the enclosure should be around 85f during the day. Once again, within a few degrees of this temp is just fine.

Night time temperatures can fall as low as 65f, but it's fairly easy to keep your night temps above this even in the winter. If you can't keep your temps above this, consider buying an under-tank heater for night time use. Using this just during the evening hours will help create a warm spot for your dragon to sleep. **DO NOT** use heat rocks as these can cause serious burns.

A thermometer on the "hot side" and one on the "cool side" will make sure that your temps are in the range they should be in.

Substrate: The best Bearded Dragon substrate will depend on your budget and how much effort you want to put into keeping it clean. If you do not mind regular cleaning, then reptile carpet is a great choice. Lower-maintenance substrates such as paper towels and tiles are excellent choices too. Most of these substrates can be found at a pet or hardware store. If you are shopping at a hardware store then make sure the material is free from dangerous chemicals that could harm your lizard.

It is best not to use loose substrates such as crushed walnut shell, sand and wood shavings. Loose substrates can be bought in bulk and are cheap and easy to spot-clean. However, they can cause impaction if accidentally eaten. Impaction is a very serious health issue and the risk is especially high in baby bearded dragons.

Feeding and Diet: Bearded Dragons are omnivorous, meaning that they eat both animal and plant matter. Any and all food items that your Bearded Dragon eats should be **no bigger** than the space between their eyes. If the food items are bigger than that space, it can cause impaction and/or hind leg paralysis.

Baby and juvenile dragons should be offered appropriately-sized crickets two to three times a day. Offer as many as your dragon will eat in 5-10 minutes. When your Beardedie stops eating, stop offering. Young Bearded Dragons can eat anywhere from 20-60 small crickets a day. Your dragon should also be given fresh greens daily. Spraying the greens with water will help them last longer and will also help keep them hydrated.

Sub-adult to adult dragons only need to eat prey items once a day along with fresh greens. Once they are this age, you can also offer them locusts, cockroaches, mealworms, waxworms, silkworms, butterworms, red worms, earthworms and just about any other worm available. **DO NOT** feed them insects that you have caught in your backyard. These bugs could have parasites that could be passed on to your Beardie or they could have been exposed to poisons that could kill your Beardie. **Lightning bugs** can also kill your Beardie so it is much safer to stay away from wild caught insects.

Prey items should be dusted once a day with a calcium supplement such as Rep-cal. All prey items should be dusted once a week with a multivitamin supplement such as Herptivite, also made by Rep-cal.

Check out www.beautifuldragons.com/nutrition.html for a good guide for food items.

Any uneaten prey should be removed from your dragon's enclosure.

There is a wide variety of greens that are available that are good for your Beardie. Dandelion greens, Collard greens, Mustard greens, Bok choy, Kale, Turnip greens, Escarole and Chicory are among the easiest to find and the best to use. Try avoiding lettuce. Most types of lettuce are composed mostly of water and hold little or no nutritional value. Spinach should also be avoided as calcium binds to it and will not be digested by your animal.

Other types of vegetables can also be offered to your Beardie, including green beans, parsnips, sweet potato, snow peas and all varieties of squash (butternut squash, yellow squash, spaghetti squash, acorn squash.) Squashes will either have to be cooked or microwaved before feeding them to your Beardie. This will soften them up and they can then be minced and eaten easier. Carrots should only be used as a treat occasionally due to the very high amounts of vitamin A. Too much can cause Vitamin A toxicity.

Fruits can also be used as treats. Avoid any citrus fruit such as oranges and grapefruit.

Water: Fresh water should be offered daily in a shallow bowl. This water bowl should be disinfected at least once a week to avoid any bacterial build up. Many Beardies may not drink from a water bowl so you may have to drip the water slowly onto your Beardies snout. Wiggling your finger in the water may also get their attention. Beardies like things that move so creating ripples in the water may get their attention.

Bathing: Bathing your Beardie once a week will help keep them hydrated and will also aid in shedding. Bath water should be warm on your wrist and **not hot**, much like bath water for a small child. Make the water only as deep as your Beardies chest or half way up their front arms. **Never** leave your Beardie unattended in the bath because they can drown. It's also good to disinfect your tub afterwards because Beardies will often defecate in the water.

Disinfecting: Take 1/4 cup of bleach mixed with a gallon of water. After mixing, you can use it in a spray bottle. This makes it easy to cover the entire surface of what you are cleaning. All surfaces that get feces on them should be disinfected, including water bowls, food bowls and cages. Spray the entire surface of what you are cleaning until it is soaked. Let it sit for 15 minutes, then scrub the surface with a rag to make sure any old food or feces is removed. Rinse all surfaces repeatedly until you can no longer smell bleach. If you still smell bleach, rinse again.

Hygiene: Hand washing is very important when owning **any** reptile. Wash your hands before handling to reduce the risk of passing anything to your Beardie. Also wash again after handling to decrease the risk of your Beardie passing anything to you, like Salmonella or parasites.