

BEARDED DRAGON CARE SHEET (REFERENCE)

Because many of the more common bearded dragon medical problems are related to (unintentionally) inadequate diet and/or environment, I have put together a bearded dragon care guide which you may find useful. Please review it as your convenience and let me know if you have any follow-up questions or concerns.

It's important that you provide bearded dragon with optimal environment:

Bearded dragons are lizards that are native to Australia. With good care they can live 10 years or more and make excellent pets. It is typically recommended to house them singly, though sometimes it is possible to keep breeding pairs together. It is recommended that the enclosure be at least 10-20 gallons for juveniles and 75 gallons for adults. Care should be taken as to the enclosure substrate as they may potentially ingest loose substrates. If you do use something like paper pulp substrate, feed the dragon in a separate enclosure to prevent substrate ingestion. Paper towels or newspaper are good substrates that are easy to replace every 1-2 days to prevent waste accumulation. It is fine to include cage furniture in the enclosure such as large rocks, pieces of driftwood or cork bark. Hiding boxes or areas are required if you have more than one dragon housed together.

-Temperature: Temperature is very important for keeping your dragon healthy with a gradient of temperature from cool to warm. Daytime temperature range with a cool side at 77-80F (25-27C), a warm side at 85-90 (30-32C) and a very warm, focal basking area of 95-105F (35-41C) for adults and juveniles and a slightly warmer 95-110F (35-44C) for babies. A nighttime temperature range of 70-75F (21.5-24C) should be provided. 30-40% humidity is recommended. Although they are from an arid region, having sufficient humidity is important to respiratory and skin issues and not too much humidity is important to prevent secondary infections from moisture loving microbes.

-Lighting: In addition to tank lighting that supplies UVA and visible light exposure, bearded dragons require UVB exposure to maintain proper health. Just as with temperature, their enclosure should have a gradient of UVB exposure with no UVB at the coolest end and highest at the basking spot. To avoid over supplementing, at least ¼ of the tank should not be directly illuminated with UVB light. Distance from the UVB bulb is vital as it dictates how much UVB exposure an animal will receive in the basking site. Distance depends upon the type and UVB output of the bulb. The most common types of UVB bulbs used with bearded dragons are the compact fluorescent (CFL), linear fluorescent or mercury vapor bulbs. For example, a CFL or linear fluorescent 15.0 should be placed 20-22" from the basking site, a 10.0 bulb should be placed 16-18" from the basking site, and a 5.0 bulb should be placed 12" or less from the basking site. A mercury vapor bulb can be used in a larger enclosure due to its greater depth of UVB penetration, up to 3 feet. The mercury vapor bulb's wattage dictates the heat output of these dual use bulbs it does not change the UV penetration. There should be no glass or acrylic between the bulb and the surface as these will block UV light. Note that metal screening between the bulb and the enclosure will cut UVB output of the bulb significantly, sometimes as much as in half. If that's the case you might need a UVB light reflector housing on your bulb to improve UVB penetration by bouncing and focusing the UV light produced by the bulb or you may need to place the bulb slightly closer to make up for loss of light ray penetration through the screen. All

UVB bulbs lose effectiveness over time, even if the light still appears to be working, it may no longer be producing UVB. It's recommended that you change the bulbs regularly, compact fluorescent bulbs at least every 6 months, linear fluorescent bulbs and mercury vapor bulbs every 12 months. Some bulbs may last longer but the only way to know for sure if they are still effective is to measure their UV output with a meter that measures UV Index or total UVB.

-Diet: Balanced diet of 30% vegetables and 70% insects for a young, bearded dragon (< 6 months old) which are more carnivorous than the omnivorous adults. That should be reversed as they age and adults fed 70-80% of their diet as vegetables for an adult. Greens should be introduced to bearded dragons at a young age. Nutritional insects include black soldier fly larvae (soldier worm larvae), superworms, earthworms, Dubia and cockroaches and the occasional wax worm, mealworm or silkworms (limit them due to their high fat content). Vegetables should be a variety of primarily dark leafy greens (dandelion greens, parsley, cilantro, watercress, escarole, endive, chicory, etc.). Some greens have high amounts of goiterogens which can impact thyroid function so while they can be fed and are nutritious, feed them in moderation and in rotation with other vegetables. Examples include, bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, kale, mustard/collard/turnip greens, arugula, cauliflower, and brussel sprouts. Lettuce, such as romaine, iceberg, green/red leaf, Boston, etc. are not very nutrient rich so should be avoided or fed in very limited quantities. Also avoid feeding oxalate rich greens like swiss chard, spinach as well as beet or carrot greens as these can interfere with calcium absorption. A small amount of other vegetables (carrots, beans, peas, squash, green beans, bell peppers, etc.) and be added; variety is the key! Salad should be chopped and offered in a clean bowl or plate once to twice a day. They can be given flowers and fruit as treats or as top dressing on the salad, with fruit not making up more than 10-20% of plant material fed each day.

-Calcium and vitamin supplementation: 3x per week dusting of salad mix with calcium powder (without Vit D3) and 2x per week light dusting of reptile multivitamin powder that has calcium, vitamin D3 and vitamin A. Insects should be dusted with calcium powder just before feeding at every meal and crickets should be both gut-loaded and calcium dusted always. Do not use calcium with vitamin D3 for daily dusting as over supplementation of vitamin D3 can lead to toxicity. It is better if the reptiles make most of their own vitamin D3 from proper UVB exposure. And if the bearded dragon is not reliably eating salad, in addition to daily dusting with calcium powder, dust the insects 2-3 times weekly with a reptile multivitamin powder that contains calcium, vitamin D3 and vitamin A.

Crickets are so-so in terms of nutrition so it's important to vary the type of insects you feed to your bearded dragon. To boost the nutritional value of the feeder insects it is recommended to "gut load" them for at least 24-48 hours prior to feeding them out. That means to feed the insects a nutritious food so that the bearded dragon gets the benefit of that nutrition. Some options for gut loading are:

Mazuri Better Bug Gut Loading Diet
Mazuri Hi Calcium Gut Loading Diet
Repashy SuperLoad Insect Gutload Formula

-Clean environment. Avoid sand or gravel substrates as bearded dragons may eat this and become impacted. Paper towels, newspaper, slate, tile or reptile carpeting are safe alternatives. Make sure to clean the substrate at least every other day or more frequently as it becomes soiled.