

Bearded Dragon Care

Bearded Dragons are one of the most commonly kept species of reptiles. Their popularity can be accredited to their highly active nature and individual personalities. With proper husbandry and care they can provide you with years of pleasure. A post purchase examination by a reptile veterinarian is recommended. You can discuss husbandry, feeding and any concerns about your pet at this time.

Housing

Bearded dragons are active, sun-loving lizards that enjoy climbing. As with any captive reptile, the enclosure must allow the dragons to behave as they would in the wild. To house one to three adults the minimum floor area should be 120cm X 60cm. There should be plenty of branches for climbing as well as multiple hide areas. Hides can range from simple cardboard boxes to attractive artificial caves from a specialist pet shop. A shallow water bowl is required for soaking and drinking from, the water should be changed daily. The enclosures should be cleaned at least weekly, daily for juveniles. Contact your veterinarian for advice on suitable & safe disinfectants, for example, Avisafe, F10.

Avoid sand or gravel substrates, as these can be swallowed resulting in intestinal blockages leading to illness or even death. Newspaper is a cheap, effective and safe substrate to use. An alternative is artificial grass matting, available from hardware stores or Clark Rubber. Have two pieces cut to size and alternate them for easy cleaning. Separate animals based on size – only keep dragons with a similar size together - otherwise bite wounds and injuries will result.

Lighting

Bearded Dragons have adapted to the harsh conditions of the Australian desert and thus have a very high Ultra Violet (UV) requirement. The best way to provide your dragons with the UV they need is with a fluorescent light. There are many types of fluorescent lights that are now being marketed as full-spectrum (daylight). Make sure the tube you use is specifically designed for reptile use, for example, Repti-Glo UV fluorescent tubes should be replaced every 12 months, even if they are still running, as their UV output diminishes to the point they are no longer providing enough UV to maintain a healthy dragon (remember to write the date on each tube when it is installed).

Fluorescent fittings should always be within 60cm from the enclosure floor as the UV emitted will only penetrate this far. Make sure there is no glass or Perspex between the light and dragon



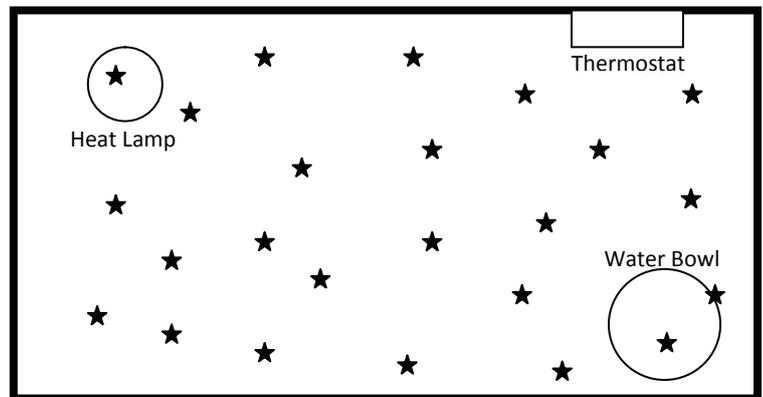
as it will filter 99% of the UV from getting to the dragon. Lights should be placed on a timer for at least 8-10 hours a day. For breeding, you may need to alter your day length with the seasons.

Temperature / Heating

Reptiles cannot regulate their body temperature like mammals and rely on the environment to provide to warmth to maintain their body temperature at their Preferred Body Temperature (PBT). In order for you dragon to regulate its body temperature, there must be areas of the cage that allows your dragon to heat up beyond its PBT and cool down below its PBT. This is called Behavioural Thermoregulation. In the wild Bearded Dragons live in hot, arid environments, thus the hot end of the enclosure should reach high 30's°C/low 40's°C, decreasing to mid 20's°C at the cooler end. This variation in temperatures across the cage is called the Thermal Gradient. The Thermal Gradient is essential for a happy, healthy (and long) life.

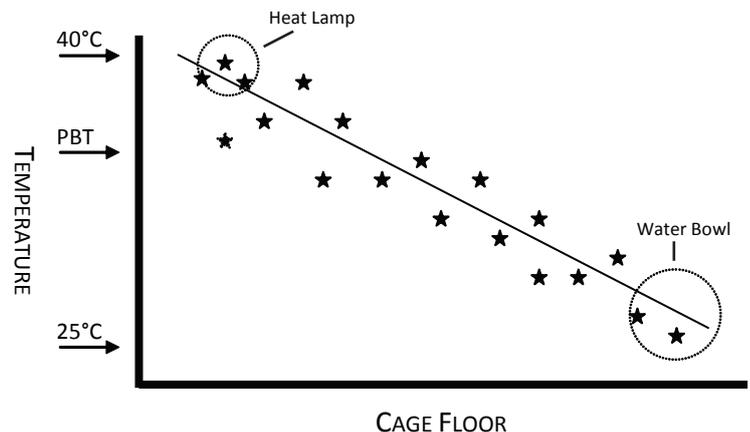
We strongly recommend plotting a temperature map for your enclosure to asses that it has a suitable thermal gradient. Take 20-30 temperatures from around the cage and plot them on a graph. You should get a graph that looks roughly like the one below:

Map of the enclosure (Cage Floor)

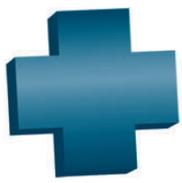


★ = Temperature Reading

Graph of the temperature readings



NB: All heating must be controlled by a thermostat placed in the cooler end of the cage



Feeding

Dragons are omnivorous – they eat fruit, vegetables, insects and other small animals. Therefore a 'smorgasbord' approach to feeding is best, offer a large range of insects, including crickets, cockroaches, earthworms, slugs, beetles, moths, spiders and yabbies. Salad and vegetables to feed include dandelion, Chinese greens, spinach, squash, zucchini, sweet potato, broccoli, beans and carrots. Fruit, for example apple, melon and banana, can make up a small part of the diet. In addition there are several brands of nutritionally balanced bearded dragon pellets that can also be offered. Young dragons should be offered live prey and greens twice daily, adult dragons are fed 3-4 times a week.

Disease Prevention

- It is very important to maintain a high standard of hygiene in the enclosure with regular cleaning. A sample of faeces should be taken to your veterinarian for analysis for worms and other parasites on a yearly basis.
- Avoid access to toxic plants and substrates that might be eaten such as sand or gravel.
- Diets should be supplemented with calcium and vitamins.
- UV lights should be replaced every 12-18 months. Consider regular access to sunlight once or twice a week but make sure your dragon is able to get out of the sun and cool down if it needs to, you don't want to cook it!

Is my Bearded Dragon sick?

A bearded dragon that is not well may show one or more of the following signs:

- Lame/ not using a leg
- Swollen toes
- Changes to the colour of the scales
- Listlessness/ Inactive
- Not eating/ refusing food
- Red gums
- Incomplete shedding

Seek veterinary attention if you notice any of these signs.

Enjoy your Bearded Dragon!