



African Spur-Thighed Tortoise

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

African Spur-Thighed Tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*): also known as Sulcata or African Spurred Tortoise. Found in North Africa, in the southern part of the Sahara Desert. They love to dig and can make very long burrows. African Spur-Thighed Tortoises grow very quickly! It is not uncommon for a three-year-old tortoise to exceed 30cm (12 in) in length.

Adult size: 24-36 inches, 80-over 100lbs

Temperature: 70-90°F

DIET

Grasses: The majority of their diet should consist of unsprayed grasses and hay. Occasional dark leafy greens, such as collard greens, mustard green and dandelion greens can be offered. Most African Spur-Thighed Tortoises like flowers as well. Edible flowers include hibiscus, dandelion, and nasturtium.

ENVIRONMENT

African Spur-Thighed Tortoises should be kept in an enclosure that provides them with plenty of space to move around and hide, at least 10' x 10' for a fully-grown tortoise.

Lighting: Tortoises require a specific wavelength of light called UVB. It is required for the proper absorption of calcium. We recommend using a full-spectrum bulb, Reptisun 5.0 or 10.0, manufactured by ZooMed. Leave UVB bulbs on for 14 hours a day, and make sure that the bulb is not filtered through glass or plastic. These bulbs need to be changed every 6 months because their effectiveness as a UVB emitter decreases over time.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs. The temperature gradient should be 90°F under the basking lamp and 70-75°F in the coolest part of the enclosure. Keep a thermometer at basking level under the lamp and at ground level on the cool end. Never use heat rocks and avoid heating pads.

Substrate: Newspaper is commonly used for indoor enclosures. If providing bedding as well, use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Timothy hay and coconut fiber are also okay if dry. Avoid linoleum, as it can cause foot problems. Avoid all types of sand, including calcisand.

Moisture: African Spur-Thighed Tortoises live in arid, sparsely vegetated areas. Misting is not required. Provide a large, shallow dish of water for soaking and defecating. Change the water daily.

Enclosure: If allowing your tortoise to graze in the yard, make sure to remove any sharp or inorganic objects from the enclosure, and supervise your tortoise at all times, as they are very good diggers and can escape easily when small. Large Spur-Thighed Tortoises can be kept in a fenced enclosure if the fence is buried at least 4 feet.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring African Spur-Thighed Tortoises in for an annual exam once a year. A blood panel may also be recommended depending on the size and age of your tortoise. We recommend performing a fecal test to check for intestinal parasites.

Common Illnesses:

Shell deformity: Sulcata tortoises grow very rapidly and are prone to shell deformities if given an improper diet.

Parasitic Infections: Symptoms include: loss of appetite, inability to gain weight, and slow growth. Diagnosis is by fecal testing and treatment involves administering an oral anti-parasitic medication.

Impaction (Intestinal Blockage): This condition is almost always caused by the ingestion of foreign objects. Symptoms include: loss of appetite and inability to produce stools. Tortoises exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away. Treatment can be difficult and sometimes requires surgery.

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI): These infections can be caused by improper husbandry, particularly when the environment is kept too cold. Upper respiratory infections in this species can be viral or bacterial in nature. Symptoms include: discharge from nose or eyes, decreased appetite, and lethargy.