



Bearded Dragon

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

The **Bearded Dragon** (*Pogona vitticeps*) is native to the rocky desert regions of central Australia. They are skilled climbers and are often found sunbathing on fence posts. They forage during the day for food, but like most desert animals they spend the hottest parts of the day hiding. The average life span is 8-10 years.

Adult size: 17-24 inches

Temperature range: 80-95°F

DIET

Invertebrates: 80% crickets, gut-loaded with T-Rex Calcium Plus or ILF formula. You can also feed silk worms and phoenix worms. You can purchase them at www.mulberryfarms.com www.mulberryfarms.com Avoid mealworms and waxworms because they are high in fat and phosphorus.

Vegetables: 20% dark leafy greens and vegetables. Good choices include collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, chard, kale, parsley, bok choy, squash, and carrots. Avoid spinach in large quantities. Spinach contains high concentrations of oxalates, which can inhibit the uptake of calcium by forming calcium oxalate crystals in the body. Also avoid iceberg and romaine lettuce because they have little nutritional value.

Fruit: Occasional. They enjoy a variety of berries, such as raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries.

ENVIRONMENT

Bearded dragons should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide.

Lighting: Bearded dragons require a specific wavelength of light called UVB. It is required for the proper absorption of calcium. We recommend using a full-spectrum bulb, the 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 ray emitter decreases over time.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs. The temperature gradient should be 90-100°F on the hot end and 80-85°F on the cool end. Keep a thermometer at basking level on the hot end of the enclosure, and at ground level on the cool end. Never use heat rocks or heating pads, as they can cause severe burns.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Coconut fiber is also okay if it is allowed to dry completely after initial wetting. Avoid all types of sand, including

calcisand. Sands can be ingested, causing blockages in the intestines.

Moisture: Wild bearded dragons live in arid, desert environments. Misting is not required. Provide a large dish of water for soaking and defecating, and change the water often.

Enclosure: Provide branches for climbing and dark areas for hiding.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring bearded dragons in for an exam once a year for blood work and a fecal test to check for intestinal parasites.

Common Illnesses:

Parasitic Infections: Symptoms include: loss of appetite, inability to gain weight, and slow growth. Diagnosis is by performing a fecal test to check for parasites. Treatment includes administering an oral anti-parasitic medication and repeating fecal tests.

Impaction (Intestinal Blockage): This condition is almost always caused by the ingestion of foreign objects or sand. Symptoms include: loss of appetite and inability to produce stools. Bearded dragons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away. Treatment can be difficult and often requires hospitalization. Avoiding the use of sand can prevent this problem!

Nutritional Secondary Hyperparathyroidism (Metabolic Bone Disease): This condition is caused by improper nutrition and lack of UVB lighting. Symptoms include: limb and jaw deformities, muscle twitching, lethargy, lack of appetite, and difficulty eating. Bearded dragons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away.