



California Desert Tortoise Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

The California Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), or Gopher Tortoise, is found in the Sonoran Desert and the Mojave Desert of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. They love to dig and can make very long burrows. Adults weigh between 8 and 15 pounds, and measure 15-38 cm in length.

DIET

Grass and weeds: Grass and weeds should make up the majority of the diet. Yard grazing is okay if there are no pesticides sprayed in the area. Always monitor your tortoise while outside to prevent escapes or attack by predators.

Vegetables: Dark leafy greens and vegetables can also be offered. Good choices include collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, chard, kale, and parsley. Avoid iceberg and romaine lettuce, as they have little nutritional value. Edible flowers such as dandelion flowers can be offered.

ENVIRONMENT

These tortoises should be kept in an enclosure that provides them with plenty of space to move around, burrow, and hide.

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. UVB bulbs should be kept on for 12-14 hours a day and the light should not be filtered through glass or plastic. These bulbs should be replaced every 6-8 months, as the amount of UVB emitted decreases over time.

Heat: Ceramic heat emitter bulbs are recommended for heating the enclosure. The temperature gradient should be 110F under the basking lamp and 75-80F in the coolest part of the enclosure. Two thermometers are recommended – one for the basking area under the lamp and

one for the coolest area. Using thermometers in this way ensures a proper temperature gradient is maintained. Never use heat rocks or heating pads, which can cause burns.

Moisture: Gopher tortoises live in arid environments. Misting is not required. Provide a large, shallow dish of water for soaking and defecating. Change this water daily.

Substrate: Newspaper is commonly used for lining the enclosure. If bedding is desired, paper-based products such as Carefresh or Yesterdays News are recommended. Make sure bedding is deep enough to allow for burrowing.

MEDICAL CARE

An annual exam performed by a veterinarian is recommended for proper care. Your veterinarian can advise you if any additional testing is required.