



## Chinese Water Dragon

### Diet and Care Recommendations

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Chinese Water Dragon (*Physignathus cocincinus*): also known as Asian, Thai, or Green Water Dragon. Native to the lowland and highland rainforests of India, southern China, and eastern and southeastern Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma). They are diurnal (active during the day), predominantly arboreal (live in trees), and are normally found along the banks of freshwater lakes and streams. Water dragons are excellent swimmers and can remain submerged for up to 25 minutes.

Adult size: 25-35 inches

Temperature: 70-85°F

Humidity: 60-80%

#### DIET

**Invertebrates:** 80% invertebrates. Crickets should be gut-loaded with T-Rex Calcium Plus or ILF formula. You can also feed silk worms and phoenix worms. You can purchase them from [www.mulberryfarms.com](http://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, bell peppers, squash, tomatoes, and carrots. Avoid spinach in large quantities. Also avoid iceberg and romaine lettuce because they have little nutritional value.

**Fruit:** Occasional, as a treat. They enjoy a variety of berries, such as raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries, and other fruits such as melon, banana, and kiwi.

#### ENVIRONMENT

Water dragons grow to a very large size, and they need an enclosure that provides them with plenty of space to move around and climb. A full-size water dragon requires an enclosure that is at least 6' high x 6' long.

**Lighting:** Water 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 80-85°F on the hot end and 70-75°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. Provide branches for climbing as well. 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. Avoid all types of sand, including calcisand. Sands can be ingested, causing blockages in the intestines.

**Moisture:** Water dragons live in an area where the humidity is 60-80%. To maintain high humidity, mist at least 2-3 times daily and place a large dish of water on the warm end of the enclosure. In some cases, a humidifier will be necessary to bolster humidity. To read humidity, keep a humidistat or hygrometer in the enclosure. Also provide a large dish of water for soaking and defecating. Ideally, the dish should be large enough for the water dragon to completely submerge. Change the water often.

**Enclosure:** Water dragons are arboreal and spend most of their time in trees. Provide plenty of branches for climbing and basking. The branches should be various sizes, and at least as wide as the water dragon's body. Also provide covered areas for hiding.

## **MEDICAL CARE**

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

### **Common Illnesses:**

**Parasitic Infections:** Symptoms include: loss of appetite (anorexia), inability to gain weight, and slow growth. Treatment includes administering an oral anti-parasitic medication and repeating the fecal test.

**Nutritional Secondary Hyperparathyroidism (Metabolic Bone Disease):** This condition is caused by lack of UVB lighting and poor nutrition. It is commonly seen in young water dragons and egg-laying females. Symptoms include: limb and mouth deformities, lethargy, lack of appetite, and difficulty eating. Water dragons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away.

**Bacterial Infections:** Can be caused by stress or poor husbandry. Symptoms include: lethargy, decreased appetite, swellings around the mouth, or dark patches on skin. Treatments vary but usually include administering oral or injectable antibiotics.

**Rostral Abrasions:** Occur when water dragons rub their noses against the sides of their enclosure. Don't use glass enclosures if you can avoid them or cover them to hide their reflections.