

# ***Aquatic Turtle***

## ***(Red-eared / Painted)***

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What is it about turtles that fascinate us so much? As kids we would catch them, and then beg our mother to let us keep them. Kids will specifically search for them in pet shops. Maybe its because turtles are so different from any other creature on earth. They make wonderful pets for everyone, as they are easy to care for and live very long lives.

### **General Diet:**

Aquatic turtles are mainly carnivores, so they eat a meat diet. On the market, commercial pelleted foods are available in our store. These foods are great to feed turtles as their basic diet.

### **Vitamins/ Supplements:**

Reptiles need to have a vitamin/mineral supplement with calcium and phosphorous. Most commercial foods will have the supplements already added. If not, a supplement should be sprinkled on the adult's food items at every second to third feeding and more often with very young reptiles. We will be glad to explain how often to feed and give supplements to your new pet.

### **Treats/Feeding Tips:**

Your turtle will enjoy treats once in a while. These can include live mealworms, crickets, earthworms, and feeder goldfish. It is best not to feed your turtle in its home, but in a separate tub that should be used only for the turtle. Leave the turtle in the tub until it defecates after it eats. This will keep the turtle's home much cleaner.

### **Housing:**

Turtles must be four inches or bigger to be sold in the United States - it is a federal law. A turtle of this size should be started in a 20-30 gallon tank. The tank should be filled approximately half way with water that has water conditioner added before the turtle is placed in it. The tank should also have an area, such as a platform with steps, for the turtle to be able to climb out onto easily. A screen can be used on top along with a light that has a reptile fluorescent bulb. This special bulb gives off full spectrum light including UVA and UVB. The UVB is especially important for these reptiles to get so they can absorb calcium properly.

The set up for a turtle must also provide heat. Reptiles are ectotherms, which means they get their heat from an outside source, unlike humans. Different areas of the habitat should be at different temperatures, so reptiles can move around to heat up or cool off. Aquatic turtles are comfortable with the temperature in their tank water at 76-78 degrees, and this can be achieved by setting up a submersible heater in the tank. Turtles also like to bask, so a basking light needs to be placed above the area where they can get out of the water. The basking area should reach a temperature between 85-90 degrees.

Filtration is also important to keep the turtle's water clean. Submersible filters work well as they can be placed under the water and in the back out of the way. Gravel may be used on the bottom of the tank.

### **Sanitation/ General Care:**

Change 50-100% of the tank water once a week depending on the size of the tank and the turtle. If there is gravel in the tank, it should be vacuumed with a gravel vacuum every two to three weeks as needed.

### **General Maintenance:**

Be sure the tank water and the basking area are at the right temperature at all times, as a chilled reptile will not eat well or at all and may get sick. Change the reptile full spectrum light as often as recommended by the manufacturer, usually every six months to a year. Although the bulb may still be working, it will lose its potency over a certain period of time and, for example, may not be giving off enough UVB to be effective for calcium absorption. Filter cartridges usually need to be changed every 3-4 weeks for the filter to be effective.

### **Health Care:**

Aquatic turtles are generally very hardy and healthy when kept in the right conditions. They do not require any yearly check ups or vaccines. Keep an eye on your pet turtle's shell, as it should look shiny and be hard, and make sure its eyes are open and clear, and check the body for any signs of infections periodically.

### **Special Section - Handling and Cleaning Precaution:**

Reptiles can carry one disease that can be transmitted to people called salmonellosis. Although it is rare for a reptile to carry this disease, it is always important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have handled your pet or anything in your pet's cage. Keep your pet out of the kitchen area and do not allow very small children to handle any reptiles. When changing water in the tank, never put your mouth over the siphon tube to start the siphon. You can fill the tube with water by submersing the whole tube in the tank then keep one end in the tank water and place a finger over the other end, pull it out, and place it over a bucket below the tank, then remove your finger. The water will begin to siphon out.

### **Supplies checklist:**

Fish tank	Siphon/ gravel vacuum
Screen top	Gravel (if needed)
Fluorescent light with reptile UVB bulb	Platform for climbing out of water
Heat lamp with basking light	Vitamin/mineral supplement (if needed)
Submersible heater	Books about Aquatic Turtles
Water conditioner	

