

# **Box Turtle**

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Although called turtles, Box turtles are more like tortoises. They live on land, although they like to take a bath once in a while, and they have a high domed shell, unlike their aquatic turtle cousins who are much flatter. But as pets, they are wonderful and will gladly roam around the yard on a warm, beautiful day enjoying the weather as much as we would. Offer your box turtle a dandelion and it will follow you anywhere!

## **General Diet:**

Box turtles are omnivores, so they eat both a meat and vegetable diet. On the market, commercial foods are available that are great to feed to box turtles as their basic diet. They can also be fed insects, worms, fruits, and vegetables.

## **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 can be given a commercial diet, but it will enjoy getting many types of food. These can include live mealworms, crickets, and earthworms for the meat part of their diet. You can also feed different types of veggies, especially dark leafy greens such as collards, mustard greens, alfalfa sprouts, dandelions, spinach. Some kale, broccoli, turnip greens, carrot, corn, green beans, peas, and squash are good secondary choices. Almost any type of fruit can be offered, and they especially like cantaloupe and apple. Don't feed too much tomatoes or bananas.

## **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. A screen can be used on top along with two types of lighting systems. One type of lighting has a reptile fluorescent bulb that 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 second light system is for 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. Box turtles are comfortable with a daytime temperature in their habitat of 78-82 degrees, a nighttime temperature of 65-70, and a basking area of 85-90 degrees. Use a daylight heat bulb in a heat lamp during the day to keep the temperature up in their habitat. Do not use human heat pads for reptiles. One dry area of the tank should be a basking area where the box turtle can lay and really warm up if wants to.

A box turtle also needs access to a water tray to soak when it wishes. The water level should be kept lower than the turtle's head, and the turtle should be able to crawl in and out of the water tray easily. Rocks, plants, and other decorations can be used as long as they don't have any rough surfaces. They do like caves or other places to hide,

especially at night. Use the appropriate reptile litter or substrate on the bottom.

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

Change the water every day as your pet may defecate in it. The litter or substrate used on the bottom should be cleaned as often as needed, and this will depend on the tank size and the turtle's size.

### **General Maintenance:**

Be sure the tank and the basking area are at the right temperatures 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.

### **Health Care:**

Box 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 be 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.

### **Supplies checklist:**

Fluorescent light with reptile UVB bulb	Fish tank
Heat lamp with daylight heat bulb	Screen top
Heat lamp with night heat bulb or under-tank heat pad	Books about Box Turtles
Heat lamp with basking light	Cave or other hiding place
Large tray of water with easy access	
Reptile bedding or substrate	
Vitamin/mineral supplement (if needed)	

