



Mediterranean (Testudo ssp.) Tortoise care sheet

Caring for your tortoise properly requires that you provide suitable temperatures, proper nutrition, clean water, a safe and secure enclosure/environment, and lots of daily attention to build and maintain trust. If you cannot, or will not provide these things, a tortoise is definitely not the right pet for you.

SUPPLIES:

- 1 - Enclosure such as a Tortoise table, aquarium, plastic tub, etc.
- 1 - Mercury vapour bulb with wattage appropriate to the size of the enclosure.
- 1 - Deep Dome ceramic light fixture.
- High Output Desert Species (minimum 10% UVB) fluorescent tube fixture that is appropriate to the size of the enclosure.
- Substrate, such as CSE Premium Forest Mulch.
- 1 shallow water dish, and 1 shallow food dish/flat rock.
- Vitamin and mineral supplements; 1 of each: Sticky Tongue Farms Miner-All Outdoor formula, Sticky Tongue Farms Vit-All or Repashy Calcium Plus LoD, Repashy SuperVeggie, cuttlebone.
- 1 - Spray bottle for misting with water.
- 1 - Good quality digital thermometer.
- 1 - Light/appliance timer; grounded if you're using grounded light sources.

SETUP:

- Place 3- 6 inches of slightly damp substrate in the enclosure.
- Locate heat and UVB lamps/fixtures over the basking area; mercury vapour lights need to be at least 12 inches from the top of the tortoises' carapace, fluorescent lights need to be no more than 12 inches from the top of the tortoises' carapace.
- Check your temperatures; aim for roughly 95°F in the basking area and 75°F in the coolest area.
- Locate feeding dish/flat stone where desired.
- Locate shallow water dish in the middle of the enclosure.
- Place one hide in a warm area and one in a cool area. Be sure to keep the warm one damp to provide an area of increased humidity.
- Place a Cuttlebone in the enclosure to provide constant access to a ready supply of Calcium and to help keep the Tortoises' beak naturally trimmed.
- Under tank heat pads may be used to supplement heat if required/desired.
- Set the timer to a schedule of 13 hours of light, 11 hours of darkness light; 7 am on to 8 pm off works well.

FOOD & WATER:

- Feed your baby tortoise daily, and offer it as much high-quality food as it can eat. Adults should go a day or two between feedings to keep them healthy. Leafy greens, Dandelion (including the flowers), and other edible grasses should form the foundation of the diet. Wild Dandelion is far superior to the store-bought varieties in

- terms of nutritive value, but it must be harvested from a fertilizer and pesticide free area. You can also offer both Rose and Hibiscus leaves and flowers, and Mulberry leaves. Hay is also a great source of a daily “foraging behaviour” type food, and it is really good for them as well. Fruit and animal protein should be avoided entirely.
- Sprinkle food with Sticky Tongue Farms Miner-All Outdoor formula daily, and Sticky Tongue Farms Vit-All, Repashy Calcium Plus LoD, or Repashy SuperVeggie, once per week in lieu of the Miner-all.
- Clean water for drinking should always be available.
- Soaking hatchlings for 15 -30 minutes daily in a shallow bath of warm water is essential.
- Mist your Tortoise and the enclosure with the spray bottle daily, or as required/desired to maintain humidity.

As hatchlings, a minimum 24 inch by 36 inch, homemade Tortoise table or similarly sized plastic tub (i.e. kiddie pool) is all that would be required for their first year or so. Providing access to natural, unfiltered sunlight is essential, so building a secure outdoor pen that allows access to the grass for use whenever the weather permits should be a top priority.

NEVER PUT TORTOISES OUTSIDE IN THE SUN WHILE IN A GLASS TANK! THEY WILL QUICKLY OVERHEAT AND DIE!

HEAT & LIGHTING: Daytime UV lighting and a temperature gradient from 75°F to 95°F are not just suggested to successfully keep baby Tortoises, they are essential. There are many variations that can be used to accomplish this, but I prefer using a combination of mercury vapour bulbs and HO 10% fluorescent tubes, both for performance and ease of use. The basking area should reach roughly 95°F, and care must be taken to ensure that it does not get either too hot or too cold. Areas furthest away from the basking area should be roughly 75°F. If you provide a proper temperature gradient, your Tortoise will be able to efficiently thermoregulate. It should be noted that UV bulbs must be placed without glass or screen between the bulb and the animal itself. UV bulbs can degrade rapidly after even their first month of use, so they need to be checked with a UVB meter regularly and replaced as needed. I always write the date of installation on a piece of masking tape and affix it to the light fixture so that I have a reliable record of each bulbs age.

SUBSTRATE: As hatchlings, the substrate can last for several months. Every substrate has its pro's and con's, so you may want to do something different and that's fine. Spray the substrate with water daily to keep some humidity in the enclosure and reduce the dustiness. Spot cleaning of feces is typically all that is required to keep the substrate clean and usable for at least several months.

FOOD & WATER: I usually feed the tortoises on a piece of flat rock or ceramic tile. Uneaten food must be removed daily to prevent any rotten material from accumulating in the enclosure. It is important to keep the water clean also, as Tortoises will often defecate in their water dish. A very shallow dish, such as the lid of a sour cream/margarine container will do great for the first few months, but it will need to be cleaned and filled several times every day. To help keep the water clean, I often put a small lid on a larger lid to keep the substrate further away from the water.

HOT & HUMID HIDE: Most research suggests that providing a hiding place that remains warm and humid will allow for healthy, smooth shell growth with as little pyramiding as possible. This is obviously recommended, although care must be taken to not place the humid hiding area in a cool environment. With tortoises, warm and humid is safe, and cool and dry is safe, but hot and dry or cool and humid can potentially create health and growth problems.