



Red-footed Tortoise Care: Life span: 55-65 years +

Vital Statistics:

- **Body Length:** 8-14 inches (20-36cm)
- **Age at maturity:** 8-12 years
- **What sex is your red-footed tortoise?** Males larger than females, and have a concave plastron (bottom shell) with a longer tail than females
- **Habitat:** Dry grasslands, forest areas, and tropical forests

What your veterinarian looks for in a healthy red-footed tortoise:

- Bright, alert and responsive attitude
- Beak should be smooth and at a length that allows mouth to open wide
- Eyes open, clear and symmetrical
- Nostrils free of discharge
- Head symmetrical with no swellings
- Strong withdrawal if a foot is pulled, and ability to lift shell off the ground
- Limbs and tail free of swellings or ulcerations
- Shell hard and symmetrical without injuries, ulcerations or pyramiding
- Vent area should be clean

What should you feed your tortoise?

Red-foots are different than most other species of tortoise in that they are omnivores. This means they will require a certain amount of protein and fruit in their diet. The majority of the diet should comprise greens and vegetables. Fruit can be offered 2-3 times per week, and animal protein offered once weekly. Your tortoise should be fed every day or at least every other day. Offer food blended together in mixtures to reduce selective feeding. The following list comprises commonly fed foods, remember to feed a variety of food items from each category.

Greens & Vegetables:

Be careful to avoid plant matter exposed to herbicides or pesticides. As a rule, anything dark green and leafy should make up a large part of the diet.

- Collard greens, beet greens, mustard greens, broccoli, turnip greens, alfalfa hay, bok choy, kale, parsley, swiss chard, watercress, clover, and cilantro.
- Other green, yellow, red, and orange vegetables that can be fed in smaller amounts can include peas, green beans, carrots, sweet potato, bell peppers, squash, and corn.

Mazuri Tortoise Diet or Zoo Med Natural Forest Tortoise Food can be used to supplement the diet, it helps to soak the pellets and mix them in with the salad. Avoid fiber-rich, nutrient-deficient and vitamin-deficient light green vegetables including iceberg or head lettuce and celery, as their composition is mainly fiber and water with little nutrient value.

- Other Plant Material can include: roses (no thorns), Hibiscus, Ice Plant, Dandelion, Chickweed (no thorns) and Prickly Pear flowers, leaves and fruit (no spines).
- Fruits offered can include: Papaya, Mango, Apple—seedless, Strawberry, Blackberry, Cactus fruit, Kiwi, Cantaloupe.



Animal protein:

- Steamed/boiled chicken/shrimp, hard-boiled egg, pinkie mouse (frozen thawed, not live), butter worms, super worms, phoenix worms, night crawlers.

Calcium Supplementation:

- In the wild, animals synthesize their own vitamin D when exposed to sunlight, which in turn helps their body absorb calcium. Calcium is needed for proper development of bones and shells, as well as normal cell function (including muscles and the gastrointestinal tract).
- Reptiles kept indoors with little access to natural sunlight or artificial UVB light and with improper calcium in their diet are susceptible to developing a condition known as metabolic bone disease.
- We **RECOMMEND** providing calcium (without added phosphorus and vitamin D) in the form of a powder, which can be added **WEEKLY** to your pet's diet.
- Juvenile and egg-laying females require calcium supplementation three times a week.
- A multivitamin can be substituted once weekly and used to provide added vitamins and minerals, especially to help in the prevention of Vitamin A deficiency.

Water:

- Fresh and clean water should be available at all times.
- Tortoise will not only drink from the water bowl but will often bathe in it as well. You can provide the water in a shallow dish, crock pot, or pan that cannot be easily tipped over. Provide the dish with a "ramp" so that the tortoise can easily climb in and out.
- You must change the water and clean the bowl frequently, as many tortoise will defecate or eliminate in their water bowl.
- Regularly soak tortoises in warm, shallow water for 10-20 minutes. For adults weekly and juveniles daily.
- A bathing tortoise should NEVER be left unattended as it can upend and drown, even in shallow water.

How to house your red-footed tortoise:

Enclosure:

We recommend housing tortoises indoors, as this is often safer and it is easier to control the environmental conditions of the enclosure. A 20-gallon aquarium is usually adequate to begin with, if starting with a juvenile tortoise. However as the animal grows, you may need to provide it with a 60 - 100 gallon aquarium, or a special room or part of a room, in order to give the tortoise ample floor space to walk around and explore.

A good rule of thumb to follow for minimum enclosure size is three times the length of the shell and four times the width. The cage should be well ventilated and does not necessarily need a protective top unless it is to keep other animals out. Provide several hiding spots so that your tortoise has multiple choices for cover and also place at various distances from the habitats heat source to provide coverage from the light and heat sources.

- These can be made from an opaque plastic storage container, ceramic flowerpot cut in half and laid on its side, or any number of items

Substrate or bedding material should be able to retain moisture, be fairly resistant to mold and bacteria, safe, and easy to clean. Additionally, it should be non-toxic to the tortoise if accidentally eaten. Newspaper, butcher paper, towels, reptile carpet, Astroturf, or other indoor/outdoor carpeting material is recommended. Cypress mulch is an ideal substrate for a



red-foot enclosure. “Forest bark” products marketed for reptiles also work well. Both of these substrates can be mixed with sphagnum moss as well to help retain moisture

- **AVOID** sand, gravel, wood shavings, corn cob material, walnut shells, and cat litter, as these are not only difficult to clean but can cause impaction if eaten by the tortoise, either on purpose or accidentally (if the food becomes covered by these substrates).
- **Cedar wood shavings are toxic to reptiles and should never be used!**

Natural branches or rocks can be provided for climbing on as well as hiding places for the tortoise to retreat to for safety. We **do not** recommend the use of under-tank heating pads or heat rocks. These are often the cause of thermal burns in reptiles and the heat produced is not easily regulated.

Temperatures:

Since red-foots come from a variety of habitats, temperature requirements for individuals can vary. Most red-foots prefer a temperature of 84–86°F. A temperature gradient should be provided so it can find the heat it needs to bask and cooler temperatures if it is too warm. An ideal daytime range of 80–92°F is preferred. Nighttime temperatures are typically in the 70’s, which is consistent with most home environmental temperatures. A secondary heat source of a ceramic heat emitter, and/or red heat lamp will be needed with temperatures below 60°F. To maintain correct temperatures, heating lamps that provide UVB lighting for calcium absorption are recommended and temperatures should be continuously monitored with thermometers. Place the thermometers lower in the tank where the tortoise is so the temperature being monitored is the environment around the tortoise, not higher near the lamps and warmer air.

Humidity:

Red-foots require relatively high humidity compared to other tortoises, averaging 70%. There needs to be a balance between moisture in the substrate and the air. Too much moisture, especially in the substrate, will lead to bacterial and fungal growth and subsequent infections of the tortoise. Add lukewarm water to the substrate on a regular basis, allowing it to dry out before adding more. A hide box with moist sphagnum moss can also be used to maintain a moist microclimate. Good ventilation is essential.

Lighting & UVB supplementation:

Reptiles require UV supplementation for the metabolism of Vitamin D3 and calcium absorption. Without this supplementation, reptiles are at risk of developing a condition called nutritional metabolic bone disease, which can be life threatening. Most bulbs sold for use in reptiles provide both UV-A and UV-B. Examples of commercially available UV-B emitting lights are the Retisun™, Iguana Light™, Power Sun™ (by Zoo Med), and Repti Glo™ lamp by Exo Terra. The UV output of these lights decreases with age, so they should be replaced every six months. For UV light to work, it must reach the pet in an unfiltered form, which means that you must make sure there is no glass or plastic between the pet and the light. The light should be within 6-12 inches from the animal in order for the pet to receive any benefit. Most species need 10-12 hours minimum UVB exposure per day. We recommend supplementing with 12-14 hours during fall to spring to prevent the need to hibernate. Regular exposure to natural DIRECT sunlight outside is encouraged and recommended whenever possible. When outdoors care must be taken, provide a shaded area for the tortoise to escape the sun if it chooses. Your pet tortoise should always be supervised if taken outside to bask in the sun to prevent escape or attack from predators.



Tips for a happy, healthy animal:

Providing as large an enclosure as possible helps provide stimulation and exercise for captive reptiles. Providing different levels, rocks, branches, plants, and substrates within the enclosure can encourage climbing, burrowing, and other more natural behaviors. Some animals can be trained to forage for their food, which provides exercise and mental stimulation. A variety of live plants for herbivores; whole heads of greens, carrots, pumpkins, or squashes can be attached to the side of the enclosure

Salmonella:

Tortoise and other reptiles naturally carry the bacteria Salmonella on their skin. For this reason one must thoroughly wash their hands after handling or cleaning a reptile's enclosure and surfaces that may have been in contact with the animal. Children and immunosuppressed individuals should be discouraged from contact with reptiles to minimize risk of infection. Symptoms of Salmonella in people range from diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, vomiting which may require hospitalization. Always wash your hands after handling reptiles.

Schedule of veterinary care:

Annual physical examinations are recommended as tegus are very good at hiding signs of illness. By performing a health check every year, we are able to assess weight, check husbandry conditions and perform testing to help with early disease prevention. Many of the most common diseases in tegus are preventable through good husbandry and nutrition.

Diseases and Clinical Signs:

Many of the most common diseases in tortoise are preventable through good husbandry and nutrition. Common issues include respiratory disease, Vitamin D and A deficiency. Common signs of illness include:

- Wheezing
- Swollen eyes
- Nasal discharge
- Bubbles from the mouth or nose
- Stretching of the neck and opening mouth
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Shell lesions

If a tortoise is exhibiting any of these signs, it is recommended to have him or her examined by a reptile veterinarian.