



Box Turtle Care: Life span: 20-30 years +

Vital Statistics:

- **Body length:** Carapace (shell) length can be 5-7 inches
- **Age at sexual maturity:** 5 years of age
- **Location:** North America
- **Habitat:** Wide variety of habitats, woodlands to grasslands/desert (certain species)
- **What sex is your turtle?** Males generally are larger and have shorter, thicker tails than females.

What your veterinarian looks for in a healthy box turtle:

- 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 to expect from your box turtle:

Box turtles can make great pets with proper care. They have interesting personalities and can develop strong bonds with their owners. They can be very long lived and there have been reports of some animals reaching over 50 years in captivity. They can be prone to stress with excessive handling and ideally should not be kept by small children. When they feel threatened, the retreat inside their shell and are able to close their lower shell with hinges to form a box. There are several species that are common in captivity and each require slightly different housing conditions.

What should you feed your box turtle? Box turtles are omnivorous. We recommend feeding a varied diet of approximately 50% vegetables and 50% high-quality animal protein with a calcium supplement.

- Young turtles should be fed everyday while adult turtles should be fed daily or every other day.

Animal-Protein Sources:

- Commercial diets such as trout chow (fish-meal based)
- Insects such as earth worms, mealworms, wax worms, grasshoppers, crickets, silk worms, moths, and slugs
- Live prey should be purchased from a store or bred at home, rather than retrieving insects from the backyard or environment. Wild insects may carry parasites or have been exposed to pesticides.

Vegetables:

- Most (80-90%) of the plant material should be vegetables and flowers, and only 10-20% should be fruits.
- 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.



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- 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.
- 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.

Supplements:

- 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 in the form of a powder, which can be added **DAILY** to your pet's diet.
- We **RECOMMEND** brands such as Rep Cal, as they provide instructions on how much calcium should be added.
- We **DO NOT** recommend just "sprinkling" the calcium supplement onto food as the exact volume being given is not known.
- A multivitamin can be substituted once weekly and used instead of a calcium supplement 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.
- Box turtles 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 box turtle can easily climb in and out. The water should be deep enough that your turtle can fully submerge itself if desired.
- You must change the water and clean the bowl frequently, as many box turtles will defecate or eliminate in their water bowl.
- You can mist the turtle with a water sprayer a few times a week as well.

How to house your box turtle:

Enclosure:

- We recommend housing box turtles 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 turtle.
- However as your 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 turtle ample floor space to walk around and explore.
 - *Bigger is better, but is also more to manage!*
- The cage should be well ventilated and does not necessarily need a protective top unless it is to keep other animals out.
- Substrate or bedding material should be easy to clean and disinfect and should be non-toxic to the box turtle if accidentally eaten.
 - Newspaper, butcher paper, towels, reptile carpet, Astroturf, or other indoor/outdoor carpeting material is recommended.
 - Some people suggest using straw, peat moss, or alfalfa pellets, as box turtles like to burrow.



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- **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 turtle, 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 turtle 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 injury in reptiles and the heat produced is not easily regulated.

Temperatures:

- Box turtles typically require a daytime temperature of 70-80 degrees F with a basking area of 85-87 degrees F.
- Nighttime temperatures should not drop below 75 degrees F.
- To maintain correct temperatures, heating lamps that provide UVB lighting for calcium absorption are recommended and temperatures should be continuously monitored with thermometers.
- Humidity should be maintained between 40-50 percent and monitored with a hygrometer.

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 or as directed by the manufacturer.
- 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.
- Regular exposure to natural DIRECT sunlight outside (unfiltered through glass) is encouraged and recommended whenever possible.
- When outdoor care must be taken, provide a shaded area for the turtle to escape the sun if it chooses. Your pet turtle should always be supervised if taken outside to bask in the sun to prevent escape or attack from other roaming animals in the neighborhood.

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.
 - Live insects for insectivores
 - A variety of live plants for herbivores; whole heads of greens, carrots, pumpkins, or squashes can be attached to the side of the enclosure



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Salmonella:

Reptiles naturally carry the bacteria Salmonella naturally 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 reptiles 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 reptiles are preventable through good husbandry and nutrition.

Common signs of illness in box turtles include:

- Common diseases include respiratory disease, Vitamin D and A deficiency.
- Common signs of illness include wheezing, swollen eyes, lethargy, loss of appetite, weight loss, nasal discharge, bubbles from the mouth, shell lesions and stretching of the neck.
- If a turtle is exhibiting any of these signs, it is recommended to have him or her examined by a reptile veterinarian.