



Bearded Dragon Care: Life span: 8-10 years +

Vital statistics:

- **Body length:** 30-60cm (12-24 in)
- **Age at sexual maturity:** 1-2 years
- **Location:** Desert of Australia, there are 6 sub-species of which three are commonly kept as pets (Central Bearded Dragon, Eastern Bearded Dragon and Pygmy Bearded Dragon).
- **Licensing:** To own a Bearded Dragon in the state of Victoria, you will be required to obtain a license from DELWP <https://www.vic.gov.au/private-wildlife-licences>
- **What sex is your bearded dragon?** Sexing juvenile bearded dragons can be tricky. As they mature, males will develop two swelling at the base of the tail just below the vent, these are the hemipenes (sex organs) and females lack these. Males often will have larger scales on the inside of the thighs (femoral pores). *Confirm the sex of your bearded dragon, as egg binding and egg laying difficulty are a potentially life-threatening condition in females, and should be taken into consideration.*

What your veterinarian looks for in a healthy bearded dragon:

- Active and alert attitude
- Clean skin with no excessive shed accumulation
- Eyes open and clear
- Mouth free of excessive mucus
- Tongue retracted fully within the mouth
- No missing toenails or toe swelling
- Good foot grip strength

What to expect from your bearded dragon:

Bearded dragons are suitable pets for children because these lizards rarely bite, scratch or whip their tails. They genuinely respond to gentle handling, and will look you in the eye, eat from your hand and rest in your lap.

What should you feed your bearded dragon?

Young bearded dragons primarily feed on insects and as they age, they transition to become primarily herbivores. Therefore, it is important to start feeding juvenile bearded dragons some salads and other vegetables at an early age so they readily accept them. As bearded dragons grow, the size of the prey and the amount of salad offered should increase. For adult bearded dragons, insects should only comprise about 25% of their diet and be offered 3-4 times a week.

Animal Protein:

Insects such as crickets, worms (earthworms or mealworms), moths and flies and cochroaches can be fed to bearded dragons. Wax worms are higher in fat and should be fed less frequently. It is important to feed insects a high quality diet to "gut-load" them in addition to offering fresh vegetables and then waiting several days before being fed to your bearded dragon. Adult bearded dragons can be offered the occasional pinky or fuzzy mouse. **AVOID** lightning bugs as they are toxic to bearded dragons. As a general rule, feed live prey with a body length no greater than 1/2 to 2/3 the width of your bearded dragons head.



Vegetables:

Salads may consist of chopped mixes of a variety of greens such as: Collard greens, beet greens, mustard greens, broccoli, turnip greens, alfalfa hay, bok choy, kale, parsley, swiss chard, watercress, clover, and cilantro. Other vegetables may comprise up to 20% of the diet for adult bearded dragons. These can include peas, green beans, carrots, sweet potato, bell peppers, squash, and corn. Fruits may make up 5% of the diet and may include papaya, melon, strawberries, blueberries, and banana. Avoid 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.

Suggested Feeding Schedules

- <1 month old: Feed 2-3 times daily (crickets, vegetable matter)
- 1-4 months old: Feed twice daily (crickets, vegetable matter, occasional mealworm)
- 4 months to adult: Feed once daily (crickets, mealworms, pinky mice, salad every other day)
- Adult: Feed vegetable matter daily (70-80% salad, 20-30% vegetables, 2-5% fruit) and live prey (insects) 3-4 times per week; pinky or fuzzy mouse once weekly

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 carbonate (without vitamin D3) in the form of a powder, which can be added daily to juveniles diet and weekly for adults.
- 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 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. Bearded dragons 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 dragon can easily climb in and out. The water should be deep enough that your bearded dragon can fully submerge itself if desired. You must change the water and clean the bowl frequently, as many bearded dragons will defecate or eliminate in their water bowl. Water can be supplemented by soaking your bearded dragon twice a week in shallow, warm water.

Housing:

Enclosure:

A 20-gallon aquarium is usually adequate to begin with, if starting with a juvenile bearded dragon 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 bearded dragon ample floor space to walk around and explore. Adults need large enclosures



that have a square footage of at least four times the length of the bearded dragon. The cage should be well-ventilated with a wire top to help prevent escape and to keep other animals out. Substrate or bedding material should be easy to clean and disinfect and should be non-toxic to the bearded dragon if accidentally eaten.

Newspaper, butcher paper, towels, reptile carpet, Astroturf, or other indoor/outdoor carpeting material is recommended.

- **AVOID** sand, gravel, wood shavings, corn cob material, walnut shells, alfalfa pellets, and cat litter, as these are not only difficult to clean but can cause impaction if eaten by the bearded dragon, either on purpose or accidentally (if the food becomes covered by these substrates). Potentially toxic plants should also be avoided.
- **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 bearded dragon to retreat to for safety. A cardboard box or clay plant pot is also a good option for a hiding area. 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:

Bearded dragons typically require a daytime temperature of 25-29 degrees Celsius (77-85F) with a basking area of 35-40C (95-104F). Nighttime temperatures should not drop below 25C (75F). If your night temperatures do necessitate a heat source, it is important to use one that does not emit light, such as a ceramic heat emitter utilized from a safe distance to avoid burning your bearded dragon. To maintain correct temperatures, heating lamps that provide UVB lighting for calcium absorption are recommended and temperatures should be continuously monitored with thermometers. Thermometers must be strategically placed on both ends of the tank and checked frequently. Bearded dragons thrive in low humidity environments of around 30-40% and a hydrometer is recommended.

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 bearded dragon to escape the sun if it chooses. Your pet bearded dragon 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 insectivores

for

- A variety of live plants for herbivores; whole heads of greens, carrots, pumpkins, or squashes can be attached to the side of the enclosure.
- Female bearded dragons should be provided with an area to lay eggs, this can be something like a shoebox filled with potting soil and coconut fiber. Ensure that the soil has no additives.

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 bearded dragons 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 bearded dragons are preventable through good husbandry and nutrition.

Common signs of illness in Bearded Dragons include:

- Lethargy, weakness and decreased appetite
- Tremors, shaking or seizures
- Eye or sinus swelling or discharge
- Limb swelling, toenail loss or lameness
- Thick mucus inside the mouth
- Straining to lay eggs, or only laying a couple at a time
- Prolapsed tissue from the vent
- Diarrhea

If you notice any of these signs please have your bearded assessed by a reptile veterinarian