

Horsefield tortoise care sheet



The Horsefield Tortoise makes a great pet for beginners and experienced hobbyists alike. They remain one of the most popular species of pet tortoise in the UK. We think this is due to their great characters and adaptability.

They can live for over 100 years and will grow to a shell length of between 8-10 inches. They are sometimes spelled as the Horsfield Tortoise as well.

Horsefield Tortoise Enclosure

Horsefield Tortoises require a [tortoise table](#) as their enclosure. This is because tortoise tables allow the maximum surface area for your tortoise to roam and regulate their temperature. Wooden vivariums do not offer sufficient airflow. This can cause high humidity which can lead to respiratory problems. Glass vivariums are also unsuitable for the same reason. As tortoise tables have an open top, they should be placed on a stable base and away from other pets or small children.

Tortoises can go outside under close supervision as they are expert climbers and diggers! It is best to use a suitable run with a shaded area to keep them in one place. This will keep out other animals and keep your tortoise away from unsuitable plants that may be poisonous.

Temperature

Horsefield Tortoises require a basking temperature of 85-90°F (30-32°C). This is the warmest temperature directly under the heat bulb. The cooler areas of the table need to be around 68°F (20°C). For this reason, it is best to position the lamp towards the side of the table furthest from the bedding area. In a warm home, you may turn heat and UVB bulbs off at night. If temperatures drop below 50°F (10°C) at night time, we recommend adding a ceramic heat emitter. These do not give off any light so they won't disturb your or your pets sleeping pattern.

Ultra Violet Light

Ultra violet light (UVB) is essential for all species of tortoise. They use it to make vitamin D3 which is needed for the formation of bone. Without a proper source of UVB, pet tortoises cannot absorb calcium properly and can develop metabolic bone disease (MBD) this means that their shell and bones will become soft and malformed.

In the wild, sunlight provides all of the necessary ultra violet light your tortoise needs. In captivity, we can replicate this by using a [fluorescent UVB](#) lamp which is mounted on the side of the table out of reach of the tortoise. These lamps give of relatively little heat so a separate heat bulb is essential. Our preferred solution is to use a mercury vapour lamp which provides the tortoise with both heat and UVB together. These lamps are very efficient and easy to mount using a ceramic reflector lamp holder.

Horsefield Tortoise Diet

Horsefield Tortoises are herbivores (vegetarian) and in the wild they eat a huge variety of plants and flowers. It is best to replicate this as best we can by offering a variety of fresh greens and supplements. The diet of European tortoises must have a calcium to phosphorus ratio of at least 2:1. This means that as an average, their diet must have at least twice as much calcium as phosphorus. Prepared [tortoise diets](#) are formulated with this in mind.

Some healthy fresh greens include...

- Spring greens
- Collard greens
- Endive
- Escarole
- Types of chard
- Dandelion
- Plantain
- Clover
- Kale

Avoid feeding your tortoise fruits or tomato as anything more than a very occasional treat. Their digestive system does not cope well with sugars and you could make your pet ill.

Iceberg lettuce is not a good food for pet tortoises. It consists of mainly water and little else. Unfortunately, if offered it, many tortoises will ignore other foods and can soon become unwell.

To guarantee that your pet is getting enough calcium (that shell requires a lot to grow) we recommend adding a [calcium powder supplement](#) to the food two or three times a week.

Water

Healthy tortoises get most of the water they need from their diet. It is still important to provide them with a shallow bowl just in case. The bowl should be large enough to allow your pet tortoise to bathe and have low sides that allow easy access. The water bowl must be kept clean daily.

Horsefield Tortoise Substrate

Horsfield Tortoises come from a dry environment in the wild. High humidity can cause respiratory problems and for this reason, your choice of substrate is very important. The Ideal substrate should be dry,dust free, soft and non-abrasive. Special [tortoise substrates](#) that consist of dry earth and sand mixed together and are ideal. Occasionally, it is natural for a pet tortoise to ingest a little substrate as they feed. Because of this, wood chips and other "chunky" substrates are no good.

Tortoises love to dig so make sure to give them an inch or two to allow this. We like to vary the depth across the enclosure for a more natural feel.

Hibernation

Adult Horsefield tortoises hibernate from around November to April in the wild. If you choose to allow your tortoise to hibernate, it is vital to have regular check ups with a reptile vet. Hibernation is a complex topic and needs quite in-depth discussion. We will be writing a whole article on it but in the meantime, it is best to either consult your reptile vet or call us.

Other things to remember

When kept properly, Horsefield tortoises make extremely hardy pets. When looked after, they can live for over 100 years! We have found that with gentle handling, they seem to love attention and can spend time out of the enclosure with supervision from their owner. Remember though that it is not a good idea to let other pets get too close. Many animals eat tortoises in the wild and your new pet tortoise won't know the difference between other pets and predators.

As with any animal, always wash your hands after handling. It is a good idea to wash pets bowls away from your own.

When your pet Horsefield Tortoise first arrives, leave him/her in the enclosure for a few days without handling. Tortoises get used to their surroundings and any move can be scary to them. many don't eat for up to a week when they are settling in. There is no cause for alarm as they are cold blooded and do not gain energy from food in quite the same way we do.

Horsefield Tortoises are a fantastic addition to many families and we hope that you and your new pet enjoy each others company for many years to come.