

## Bearded Dragon Caresheet



Bearded Dragons are one of the most popular pet lizard species in the UK. This is because they are easy to keep and respond well to captivity. Many Bearded Dragon owners testify that these lizards will bond with humans and have a playful character. They originate from Australia and live in dry forest areas at the edge of the desert.

### **Bearded Dragon Enclosure**

Bearded dragons are naturally good climbers but most of their life is spent close to the ground on hard compacted clay and sand. For this reason, the length of the enclosure is more important than the height. Wooden vivariums hold heat better than glass ones so are a better choice. Because Bearded Dragons come from a dry environment it is important that they aren't exposed to cool temperatures and high humidity. Good air circulation is essential to avoid problems.

An adult Bearded Dragon will need an enclosure of at least 48" x 15" x 18" but bigger is better. We do not recommend keeping babies or juveniles in small set ups because it is very difficult to provide a stable temperature gradient. Because youngsters would naturally spend more time hiding in the wild it is essential that you provide them with decoration and hiding places in the vivarium.

### **What Temperature Do Bearded Dragons Need?**

Bearded Dragons require a basking temperature of 98.6-102°F (37-39°C). This is the warmest temperature directly under the heat bulb. The cooler areas of the vivarium need to be around 80°F (27°C). For this reason, it is best to position the lamp towards the end of the vivarium furthest from the bedding area. The Heat bulb holder should be securely attached out of the lizards reach. Position your heat bulb an equal distance from the front and the back and about a quarter of the way along. In a warm home, you may turn heat and UVB bulbs off at night. If temperatures drop below 60°F (15°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.

The only way to guarantee a safe, stable temperature gradient is by using a thermostat. These devices constantly monitor the temperature and adjust the power to the bulb accordingly. There are several different types and the one that is required for a heat bulb is called a dimming thermostat.

## Ultra Violet Light

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

In the wild, the hot Australian sun provides all of the necessary ultra violet light your Dragon needs. In captivity, we can replicate this by using a [fluorescent UVB](#) lamp which is mounted in the top of the vivarium. These lamps give of relatively little heat so a separate heat bulb is essential.

## What Do Bearded Dragons Eat?

Beardies are omnivores. This means that they eat both plants and small invertebrates. Insects make up 75% of the diet of young Bearded Dragons and the remaining 25% is plant matter. As they grow these proportions reverse so an adult should be fed 75% greens and 25% insects. The diet 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.

As the variety of food for a dragon in captivity is smaller than they would get in the wild we need to add calcium supplements to their diet. Calcium can be added to fresh greens by sprinkling a very small pinch on the food every other day for young dragons and twice weekly for adults.

### Healthy greens include...

- Spring greens
- Rocket
- Watercress
- Chard
- Endive
- Escarole
- Grated Butternut squash

### Occasionally (no more than 10% of the diet)

- Non citrus fruits such as apple, blueberry, strawberry, mango and melon.
- Bell peppers
- Spinach (high in oxalates prevent calcium absorption)
- Cucumber (high water content)
- Tomato

Avoid feeding dragons fruits including 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 reptiles. It consists of mainly water and little else.

Unfortunately, if offered it, many animals will ignore other foods and can soon become unwell.

Avocado is thought to be fatally poisonous to most birds and reptiles so never feed it to your pets.

## **Live foods**

Bearded dragons should be fed as many live crickets or locusts as they will eat in five minutes daily. Any remaining after this time should be removed. A good rule of thumb is to choose live foods with a body length equal to the distance between your lizards eyes when viewed from above.

There are several types of live food commonly available...

- Locusts: Great feeder insect
- Black or brown crickets: Good food but large crickets can nip so don't leave in the vivarium over night
- Waxworms: Loved by most beardies. Feed sparingly though as waxworms are very fatty.
- Mealworms: Good if other foods aren't available. Low nutritional value as there is very little "meat" and lots of shell.
- Morioworms: Slightly better than mealworms but not suitable for young dragons due to their size.
- Dubia roaches: Great feeder insect, not for the faint hearted!

Calcium can be added to live foods by placing the insects in a bag along with a small pinch of calcium supplement. gently shake the bag to coat the insects before releasing them into the vivarium. If you are squeamish, place your insects in the fridge five minutes prior to feeding. This will send them to sleep and make them easier to handle.

Captive bred insects have a fairly low nutritional value so feed your insects a selection of greens suitable for your dragon. You can also purchase special insect foods. By ensuring that your insects receive the best diet you will pass this nutrition on to your pet. this is known as "gut loading".

## **Water**

Healthy Bearded Dragons 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 small and have low sides that allow easy access. The water bowl must be kept clean daily and tidied up after any spills. Do not position the water bowl directly under the heat bulb as this will cause the humidity to rise.

## **Bearded Dragon Substrate**

The Ideal substrate should be dry ,dust free, soft and non-abrasive. There is much debate regarding the most suitable substrates. We have successfully used wheat based substrates for many years but some customers prefer natracel or earth and sand mixes. Occasionally, it is natural for a pet beardie to ingest a little substrate as they feed. Because of this, wood chips and other “chunky” substrates are no good.

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

## **Other Things To Think About.**

Bearded Dragons are solitary animals so if you want a pet lizard that you can keep communally a leopard gecko may be a better choice. Keeping more than one Bearded dragon together will almost

never work out well as they may fight.

### **Do Bearded Dragons Bite?**

Despite having strong jaws and teeth, when raised in a loving home Bearded Dragons are one of the least likely pets to bite. Certainly far less likely than a hamster or other rodents. If a Dragon feels threatened, it's first response is to run away fast. If cornered they will open their mouth and inflate the black "beard" that gives them their name.

### **Do Bearded Dragons Make Good Pets?**

When Provided with the correct environment and lots of love Bearded Dragons make fantastic pets! Beardies seem to bond more with their keepers than most other reptiles. They really seem to enjoy interacting with their owners and have a great personality.