

Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) Information

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Diurnal animals
 Heliothermic – Get heat from the sun
 Life expectancy: ± 10 years
 Sexual maturity: 18-24 months
 Length of pregnancy: 4-6 weeks
 Growth spurt (4000%) seen over the 1st 6 months

Bearded dragons otherwise known as “beardies” are omnivorous lizards but are mostly herbivores. Beardies originate in hot, arid, rocky, semi-desert areas in central Australia and those kept in captivity occur in a variety of colours and sizes.

IMPORTANT

The correct habitat, lighting, and Calcium and Vitamin D3 levels in the diet will ensure that your beardie grows up strong and healthy.

Behaviour:

Beardies can be social animals, however it is recommended that males not be kept together.

Arm bobbing – Intra-species acknowledgment or submissive gesture

Tail curling – Alertness

Head-bobbing – Mating behaviour

Gapping or panting – Hot

Open-mouth with extended beard – Threatening behaviour

Tongue tasting – Tasting of food and evaluation of new objects or other beardies

“Sexing” a Beardie (>2yrs)

Males:

1. Larger femoral pores
2. No pre-anal pores
3. More prominent and darker beard
4. Larger head

Signs your beardie is pregnant: Increased appetite, swelling of the abdominal area (2-3 weeks into pregnancy) applying gentle pressure on the belly you will be able to feel grape-like lumps (i.e. eggs).

Grooming:

Beardies naturally shed their skins in patches as they grow and dead skin should fall off naturally with no help. Access to water is needed to help skin shed easily. Beardies covered in faeces can be bathed in a plastic container filled with shallow warm water using a gentle toothbrush to scrub the skin.

Habitat:

The consensus for reptiles is the bigger their cage the better they fare. Cages should be made of smooth, non-abrasive materials such as glass and plastic. Wood is not recommended as it is not easy to clean or disinfect from bacteria and mould. As a rule of thumb, a long rectangular glass tank of about

HABITAT GUIDELINES

- 40 Gl glass tank
- Mat or astro-turf substrate
- Hiding places
- Basking structures
- Heat lamps
- Temperature gradients (30-37°C)
- UV-B light source
- 14 hours of daylight in summer & 12 hours in winter
- Frequent cleaning

INTESTINAL PARASITES ARE

VERY COMMON. Cage and food hygiene is of the outmost importance to prevent infection and disease!!! **DISINFECT** cage immediately if contaminated!

40 gallons can be used to keep a captive beardie. We recommend the use of newspaper, indoor/outdoor carpets, special reptile mats or fake grass (astroturf) as a substrate for your beardie habitat. These can easily be cleaned and do not pose health risks (i.e. GIT blockages, skin infections, internal parasite problems) like sand, wood chips, sawdust, etc. Beardies are very prone to intestinal parasites and cages should be cleaned as often as possible

of faeces and urates which encourage the presence of parasites. Cages consisting of substrate like sand are hard to disinfect once parasites have contaminated the habitat. Low climbing and basking structures such as rocks and branches should be placed throughout the cage, providing different distances from a heat source. Hiding or shading places should also be offered, such as cardboard boxes or non-toxic plants (geraniums, live clover, dandelion, parsley). For some added humidity a shallow tray with water or even a small box with wet peat moss may be added into the habitat. Misting the tank occasionally can also be good for these desert lizards.

Nutrition:

IMPORTANT: Calcium deficiency is common in beardies causing problems such as metabolic bone disease, growth suppression and disease. This is especially true in young beardies and therefore calcium supplementation is crucial for natural growth and health.

DIET

Without a good diet, young beardies will not grow well, develop bone problems, and are more susceptible to disease.

The nutritional requirements of hatchling, adolescents and mature beardies are different and the diet therefore varies according to age. Food should be offered in the morning so that digestion occurs during the warmest parts of the day. Food will include live "gut-loaded" insects and vegetables, as well

as fruits which are given in small amounts as treats. Insects include crickets and in lesser amounts cockroaches, mealworms and superworms. **Important that not too many mealworms and superworms are fed, especially to mature beardies as these are high in fat.** Vegetables that can be offered include but are not limited to dandelion, clovers, mustard leaf, beet tops, bokchoy, rocket, kale, green beans, romaine, carrots, zucchini (in small amounts), sweet potato and squash. Limit cabbage and spinach. **Corn and peas can be given however are not recommended as their nutritional value fluctuates. Lettuce and celery have very little nutritional value as they are mostly water.** Fruits are also high in water and the best fruits to offer include figs, mango, papaya, pear, kiwi, berries and banana. Water should be given in a shallow dish and should be kept fresh and cleaned as often as needed.

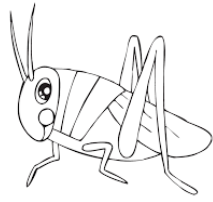
Hatchlings and juveniles: Young beardies will require food that has higher protein, vitamin and calcium levels than mature beardies to supplement fast and healthy growth. **Please ask our receptionist for the table of nutritional values found in vegetables to familiarize yourself with types of food you can feed.** Encourage new food every day so that they will enjoy a wide variety of food as they age. Chop and mix or blend all veggies to reduce selective eating. If your pet does not like a certain type of food offer it continuously as they eventually get used to them. A day or 2 after hatching, babies should be lively eaters and should be offered 30% vegetables and 70% appropriately sized crickets. Crickets offered should be the size of the width of the bearded dragon's head and not bigger, as this may cause partial paralysis. Crickets that are gut loaded is more advantageous to feed. Offer

Fruits

- Mango
- Kiwi
- Papaya
- Berries
- Figs
- Cherries

Vegetables (dark & leafy)

- Dandelion
- Clover
- Beet leaves
- Romaine
- Sweet potato
- Kale
- Green beans
- Endive
- Broccoli
- Shredded carrot
- Mustard leaves
- Turnip leaves
- Alfalfa (fresh)
- Watercress
- Parsley
- Basil
- Hibiscus flowers
- Rose petals
- Very little cabbage and spinach
- No celery or lettuce

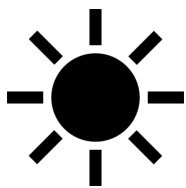


only few live crickets at a time 2-3 times daily for <2 month old and 2 times daily for 2-4 month old (juveniles). Crickets should be lightly dusted (small pinch) once a day with calcium carbonate powder (or alfafa powder found at health stores) and a vitamin-mineral supplement that offers vitamin A can be provided once a week (both can be found at CEAH or Stodels). There should not be leftover crickets in the cage. Vegetables not eaten at the end of the day should be removed and fresh veggies should be given. Drinking water must be offered in a shallow saucer (sometimes they need help to find water) and changed as often

as dirty. Hatchlings that are hungry/malnourished will bite other hatchlings, more food must be given in this case.

Adolescents (4 months): Adolescents should be offered a diet consisting of 50% vegetables and 50% insects. Beardies older than 4 months of age to adulthood can be fed daily. Crickets should be offered 1-2 times daily and consumed within 10 minutes. Calcium supplementation can be sprinkled on food and reduced to 3 times a week and vitamin/mineral supplements to once a week. At this age 1 or 2 superworms can be given 2- 3 times a week as well. Too many snacks and treats may cause diarrhea and should be limited.

Mature: Vegetables become a more substantial part of the diet at adulthood and adult beardies should be offered a diet consisting of 80% veggies and 20% insects. 4-6-week-old crickets with 1-2 superworms can be fed daily or every second day. The occasional other vertebrates can be fed (cockroaches, locust). Supplemented (calcium, vit and mineral) salads should be offered weekly. Calcium and vitamin supplementation should be increased for old beardies.



Lighting and photoperiod: Lighting is of the utmost importance for beardies. They require UV light to produce vitamin D3, which is vital for the absorption of calcium from the intestinal tract. Poor lighting can lead to calcium deficiency in turn leading to a number of health issues. Natural light is always recommended as the best light and beardies should be placed outside on warm days. Where this is not always possible UV-B bulbs (Mega-Ray UV-B 12.0, Exo Terra UV-B 100) should be used and can be found at Stodels. UV-B rays will be filtered through glass and any light source should not be placed as to go through glass windows or tanks. Beardies should be placed directly under the light source. A combination of full spectrum bulbs (UV-A and UV-B) and UV-B bulbs can benefit your beardie because although UV-A is not as important it can play a role in behaviour. Beardies should be given a light source for 14 hours per day in Summer and reduced to 12 hours in winter.



Temperature: Beardies are desert animals and require external heat sources to regulate their body temperatures which in turn assists in food digestion and immune system function. The habitat should offer a temperature gradient throughout, with one side of the habitat offering a “hot-spot” close to the upper temperature limit (32-37 °C). This can be achieved by placing a basking structure as close as possible to the heat source (heat lamp). The beardie should be able to move away from this “hot-spot” to a lower temperature environment (30-32°C) when it wants. Night temperatures may go as low as 25°C. The main heat source should maintain a constant background heat of the habitat with additional heat sources such as a heating pad providing direct heat to certain areas of the habitat. Heat sources commonly used for beardies are heating pads (Although a great way to generate direct heat, caution must be taken as they are known to malfunction) and incandescent light bulb such as infra-red lights or ceramic heating elements (these can also be found at Stodels). “Hot-rocks” are not recommended as these may cause severe burns.

Most common signs your beardedie is sick

- Lethargic
- Closed eyes
- Lies flat
- Inactive
- Not eating
- Not drinking
- Continuous gaping
- Slow growth rate
- Change in colour (dull)
- Enlargement of leg bones

When to take your beardedie to the vet

Proper care following the guidelines suggested in this information sheet should help reduce the likelihood of disease. Beardedies are very good at hiding symptoms until late stages of illness and preventative check-ups can help catch a disease early when they are more easily treatable. A beardedie should ideally be checked twice a year by the veterinarian and frequent faecal examinations should be done throughout the year for internal parasites, as this is one of the most common health problems observed.