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MARYLAND AVIAN & EXOTICS VETERINARY CARE
Where All Life Matters

# *BOX TURTLE HUSBANDRY*

## *CAGING*

A 30-gallon tank with a screen top or a Rubbermaid container 30"x15"x8" should comfortably accommodate 1 box turtle. The safest substrates are cypress mulch, newspaper, indoor/outdoor carpet, and recycled newspaper products such as Carefresh. Clean fresh water should be available. Misting the cage daily and soaking the turtle daily will help ensure that it is well hydrated and sheds properly.

## *LIGHTING AND TEMPERATURE*

A basking area with an incandescent bulb should be offered on one side of the cage. The temperature under that light, where the turtle sits should reach 85-90 degrees F. You also need to offer a 5.0 UVb fluorescent light over the basking area. This bulb needs to be 7-15 inches from the animal in order for the animal to benefit from it. Make sure there is NO glass or plastic between this bulb and your box turtle as this filters out the useful rays. Lights should be on for 12 hours daily, and UVb fluorescent bulbs (straight) need to be replaced every 6 months (even if they still work). Another reliable source of UVb is a mercury vapor bulb (Active Heat by T-Rex or PowerSun by Zoomed). These bulbs provide a source of heat as well as UV light. Avoid other UVb lights because they may cause health problems. At night the temperatures should not drop below the upper 70's, if they do, provide a under the tank heating pad or red light bulb.

## *DIET*

Complete Diets: About 30-40% of the diet should consist of a complete box turtle diet. Be sure to offer a pelleted diet and soften it in water before giving it to your box turtle. You may have to smash it up with fruit to get your turtle to eat it.

Fruit and Greens: If you have an Eastern or a Western/Ornate box turtle about 20-30% of the diet should consist of healthy fruits and leafy greens. Try kiwi, all melons, mango, all berries, some banana, kale, collard greens, romaine, red and green leaf lettuce and some shredded carrot and sweet potato. If your turtle won't eat the veggies, shred them very fine and mix them with smashed fruit.

Insects and worms: About 30-40% of the diet for Eastern and Western/Ornate box turtles and about 70- 80% of the diet for Three-toed box turtles should consist of "gut loaded" earthworms, crickets, grubs and mealworms. Always purchase these from a pet shop or a bait shop since insects caught outdoors could contain toxins. See the cricket care handout.

## *VETERINARY CARE*

Yearly examinations are recommended for box turtles and other reptiles to help prevent disease and husbandry related problems. A majority of health problems in reptiles are caused by improper diet and environment. Metabolic bone disease, impactions respiratory infections and reproductive related problems can easily be prevented with veterinary guidance. It is also important to check newly purchase for pre-existing conditions and for internal and external parasites. To schedule an appointment, please call our office at 240-687-1414.