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MARYLAND AVIAN & EXOTICS VETERINARY CARE
Where All Life Matters

TORTOISE HUSBANDRY AND CARE

CAGE
Rubber Maid and Tupperware containers work better than glass aquariums for tortoises. Start with one about 18"x12" with sides at least 6-7" high (they can climb well) for a hatchling. As they grow increase the size when needed. Giant species such as G. sulcata will eventually need a custom enclosure, or perhaps part of a room.

LIGHTING
A basking area with an incandescent bulb should be offered on one side of the cage. The temperature under that light, where the tortoise will actually sit should reach 92-95 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 your tortoise to benefit from it. Make sure there is NO glass or plastic between this bulb and your tortoise as it will filter out the useful rays. Lights should be on for 12 hours a day and UVb fluorescent bulbs need to be replaced every 6 months (even if they still work). Another source of UVb is a mercury vapor bulb. Active Heat (T-Rex) and Power Sun (Zoomed) bulbs are they only reliable and safe products. Avoid other UVb bulbs because they may cause damage to the eyes. If the temperature at night drops below the upper 70's then an under the tank heating pad or red light bulb will be necessary. Natural sunlight is always the best source of UV light. However, leaving a tortoise outside in an enclosed container may be life threatening because they can overheat. You can build outdoor enclosures but they must prevent the tortoise from digging out and animals like dogs, cats or raccoons from getting in. Do not leave your tortoise unsupervised while outside unless you have a animal proof structure.

SUBSTRATE
Newspaper/paper towels are the safest substrate to use for tortoises, especially hatchlings. As the tortoise grows, you can switch to a particulate substrate such as a recycled newspaper product like Carefresh, or to cypress mulch for humid species. If using a particulate substrate, always feed your tortoise on a paper plate or piece of newspaper to lower the chance for intestinal blockage.

DIET

Greens: 70-80% of the diet should consist of dark leafy greens such as: Collards, romaine, kale, red/green leaf lettuce, endive, mustard greens, escarole, etc. Fruit: If you have a S. American species such as a Red or Yellow Foot tortoise, you need to add healthy fruits into the diet. Try kiwi, all melons, papaya, mango, all berries and some banana.

Hay: Timothy and alfalfa hay are good sources of fiber for all species of tortoise. It may be difficult to digest if your tortoise is not adequately hydrated or is a hatchling. Wait until your tortoise is about a year old to start offering hay.

Complete Diets: 20-30% of the diet should consist of a complete (pelleted) tortoise or iguana food. Be sure to use a pelleted diet, and soften it in water before giving it to your tortoise. Water: Keeping your tortoise adequately hydrated is very important, even for desert species. Offer a shallow, non-spill bowl in the enclosure. It should be small enough that the tortoise cannot climb into it, flip over and drown. All tortoises should be soaked in shallow warm water for 15-20 minutes. Hatchling and young of all species should be soaked daily and misted 1-2 times daily. Soak adult desert species 1 time weekly and adult tropical species 2-3 times weekly.

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TORTOISE CONTINUED

Vitamin supplements: If you feed your tortoise only greens, you will need to supplement it at each feeding. You should use a plain calcium supplement 3-4 times weekly, and a multivitamin (with Vit. A) 1 time weekly. If your tortoise's diet consists of 50% complete diet, this is not necessary.

VETERINARY CARE

Yearly examinations are recommended for tortoises 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. As the larger species of tortoises get bigger and stronger, sedation may be needed in order to perform a complete physical exam. If you would like to schedule an appointment please contact out office at 240-687-1414.