

CARE GUIDE

BEARDED DRAGON

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Common Name	Bearded dragon
Scientific Name	Pogona vitticeps
Average Size	45 to 60 cm (18-24")
Average Lifespan	10 to 20 years. As we learn more about the needs of reptiles in captivity, they are living longer and healthier lives, and their average lifespan is an estimate.
Oldest in Captivity (if known)	18+ years old. His name was Sebastian and he was located in the United Kingdom. There are reports from keepers of having bearded dragons in their early 20s as well.
Natural Range	Their native habitat includes the semi arid desert, scrublands, and dry forests of Australia.
Temperament	Calm, curious, and social. Bearded dragons are popular as pets due to their social nature. Please note that animals also have individual personalities and there are outliers to the standard temperament.
Behaviour	Bearded dragons are diurnal (active during the day). Bearded dragons love to bask and can commonly be found sunbathing on any elevated surface. Bearded dragons retreat to burrows when they need to cool down, or to escape from predators.
Cohabitation	Bearded dragons are fiercely territorial and should never be housed together, period. Cohabitation can result in bite wounds, limb loss, and competition for food can lead to weight loss and malnutrition. Pet stores often group juvenile bearded dragons together to cut costs, claiming that they're "cuddling" when they're actually competing for a basking spot; it's competition, not affection.
Activity Level	Active during the day. Some are quite active while others are lazy couch potatoes.
Conservation Status	IUCN - least concern
Enclosure Size	<p>There is an antiquated myth that reptiles will feel "overwhelmed" when they are placed in a large space; reptiles will utilise every inch of space they are provided as long as they feel safe. You can make an animal feel safe by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limiting your use of reflective surfaces, such as glass ● Use front-opening enclosures as approaching from above is something a predator would do ● Provide leaf litter, plants, and plenty of hiding places <p>The minimum size an enclosure should be is the size that allows the animal to have an adequate temperature gradient and room to explore. The minimum size recommended for an adult bearded dragon is 48x24x24". Floor space and climbing opportunities are equally important as bearded dragons love to bask on elevated surfaces. If you provide a</p>

	larger enclosure, they will utilise it fully.
Enclosure Materials	<p>Glass: difficult to maintain temperatures and humidity. Has a reflective surface that can stress animals out. Heavy, difficult to move, and easy to break.</p> <p>Wood: heavy, difficult to move. Easier to maintain temperatures and humidity than glass. Needs to be sealed or it will rot.</p> <p>PVC: light-weight, easy to move. Best material to maintain temperatures and humidity. Does not rot, can seal seams to hold water. More expensive. There are different grades of PVC that affect its ability to bend/warp/deform, resist scratching, etc; you get what you pay for when it comes to PVC.</p>
Temperature Range	<p>Warm end: 38-42°C Basking surface: 42-45°C Cool end: 21-25°C Night: 12-24°C</p> <p>Temperatures do not need to be exact as temperature fluctuations in nature are normal. If your bulb burns out or you are experiencing a power outage, do not feed your animal until they have had a period of 24-hours with adequate temperatures as they will not be able to digest their food if they are too cold. Measure surface temperatures with a temperature gun (infrared thermometer); use digital thermometers for measuring ambient heat.</p>
Humidity Range	Average humidity should be between 30-40%. Average household humidity in Canada is sufficient. However, if you live in a tropical climate, it will be difficult to maintain appropriate humidity for this species. The range of bearded dragons in Australia is massive and they are exposed to a variety of environments and seasonal weather conditions.
Lighting	Bearded dragons thrive in bright environments; having bright light allows them to regulate their day/night cycle, which is beneficial for their wellbeing and stimulates appetite. A 12 hour on/off cycle is recommended.
Heating	<p>We recommend using halogen heat lamps for day time heat. Halogen bulbs supply heat to animals in the most natural way (from above) and produce infrared A and B, which are the wavelengths that are produced by the sun. These wavelengths penetrate deep into the reptile's body, providing them the energy to efficiently digest their prey and maintain healthy bodily functions. The wattage of the bulb will depend on the ambient temperature in your home, the material of the enclosure, the height at which the bulb is placed, and air flow. Getting correct temperatures in your enclosure is a matter of trial and error and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.</p> <p>Additionally, you should use a dimmable lamp and a thermostat to monitor your temperatures more efficiently. The thermostat will detect the</p>

	<p>temperature of the enclosure and adjust the strength of the bulb to match the set temperature.</p> <p>Black/red/blue bulbs that are often advertised for night-time heating are not necessary. Coloured bulbs are known to affect a reptile's vision and any heat source that emits light will interfere with your animal's day/night cycle. If your home gets cold at night (below 12°C), we recommend using a deep heat emitter as these emit heat and no visible light. Deep heat emitters only emit infrared B and C, making them less ideal than halogen bulbs.</p> <p>Using heat mats, "belly heat", heat rocks, and heat panels are all outdated methods and there are much safer and healthier options for your reptiles.</p>
UVB	<p>Bearded dragons require high UVB output, they love to bask. Use fluorescent linear UVB bulbs that cover half the length of the enclosure. The UVB and basking area should overlap so that the animal receives both at the same time. The optimal UVI gradient for bearded dragons is 4.0 - 6.0. There are various factors that can affect the efficiency of a UVB bulb such as mesh screen lids, faulty manufacturing, used bulbs, and distance from the basking area. UV index can be measured with a metering device such as Solarmeter to ensure you are providing adequate amounts of UVB for your animal. Never use coil-type bulbs, mercury vapour bulbs, LED UVB, or any "all-in-one" type of bulb - they are inaccurate and can be dangerous. LED UVB is a new technology and studies using a Solarmeter have found that it is not quite reliable when it comes to UVB output. However, there is hope that as development continues, the quality will continue to improve as well. UVB bulbs need to be replaced as they lose output over time; even if a bulb is still emitting light, it can be emitting no UVB and you will need a Solarmeter to read the output.</p>
Substrate	<p>Bearded dragons in the wild have been found to avoid areas where the ground is primarily sand. Instead, they prefer clay and sandy soils, as well as rocky crevices. It is recommended to use a mixture of rinsed play sand and organic topsoil. We use Reptile Ready's Arid Mix which is a bioactive substrate that includes rinsed play sand, organic screened topsoil, and insect frass. This substrate can be used as a naturalistic substrate as a stand alone, or as a bioactive substrate with isopods, springtails, and live plants. You can create your own mixture as well: ensure the topsoil does not have any additives such as fertilisers, compost, manures, or chemicals. Rinse the play sand to remove dust and allow it time to dry. You can sterilise the substrate by baking it to remove any unwanted microorganisms, but this is a personal choice (30 minutes at 200°C - let cool before adding it to the enclosure). Loose substrate does not cause impaction - improper husbandry does. Never use calcium sand (binds when wet), vitamin sand (binds when wet), ground nut shell such as walnut (dusty and causes gastrointestinal issues), wood bark or shavings (moulds, dusty, unnatural), linoleum (VOCs when heated), shelf liner (VOCs when heated), or reptile carpet (impossible to keep clean, can rip out nails).</p>

Handling	Always support their full body from below. Gently scoop them up with one hand underneath, and place one hand lightly on top in case they decide to run or jump as a fall can result in injury. Never pick up an animal by the tail or limb, or without properly supporting their full body.
Feeding	Feed adult bearded dragons 4-5 times each week. Offer as many insects as they will eat in a 15 minute period 2-3x a week. Remove uneaten insects to prevent injury to your bearded dragon. Feed vegetables 3x a week. If your bearded dragon stops eating, monitor their weight and water intake. If they begin to lose weight quickly, bring them to a vet.
Diet	Bearded dragons are omnivores and they eat a diet of live insects, vegetables, and occasionally fruit. Do not feed adult bearded dragons a diet of purely insects as they can become obese and/or develop a painful condition called gout. Dehydrated or freeze dried insects should never be used as a staple in an animal's diet as they provide little-to-no nutrition and can lead to dehydration. Insects that bearded dragons enjoy are: grasshoppers, crickets, mealworms, superworms, waxworms, black soldier fly larvae, silkworms, hornworms, and roaches. There is no single food that provides a balanced diet, you must provide a diverse diet to ensure your animal has access to a variety of minerals and vitamins. Some vegetables to feed your bearded dragon include, arugula, bok choy, collard green, endive, mustard greens, turnip greens, and watercress. There is a common misconception that arid species do not require water or should not be offered it because of fears of high humidity; all reptiles require water, including bearded dragons. Always ensure they have access to filtered or spring water in a shallow bowl. If you find your animal is not drinking water, you can add a water bubbler to the bowl; this disturbs the water surface and often encourages the animal to drink by making the water more visible.
Multivitamin + supplements	Dust all feeder insects with calcium powder. Ensure to use a multivitamin powder as many animals in captivity can easily develop deficiencies. Follow the manufacturer's directions for usage and frequency. Please be aware that there is limited research conducted on reptile nutrition, with much of our understanding derived from practical observations.

The information in this care guide is based on both practical experience as well as research papers published by reputable sources. Reptile husbandry is constantly evolving as we learn more about these remarkable creatures, never rely on one source for information and always strive to learn more.