

# Bearded Dragon



## Getting Started Things You Will Need

- \* Cage Minimum of 36" X 18" X 15 "
- \* Reptile sand for bedding  
(after Beardie is at least 6 months old)
- \* Water dish
- \* Food dish
- \* Rocks & other climb units
- \* Heating pads or rock  
(Exoterra)
- \* Food pellets
- \* UV light bulb and fixture
- \* Misting bottle
- \* Temperature gauge

Please make sure you set their new cage up before putting them in it. It can be a little stressful going to a new home and environment.

## HOUSING:

A 20 gallon long aquarium is the bare minimum for a juvenile Bearded Dragon. For an adult the minimum is a 40 gallon, though this is small. Generally the minimum should be 2 x their STL (Stretched Total ) length for the length, 1 x the STL for the

width and 1 × the STL for the height, this will be about a 4' × 2' × 2' for a large Dragon. The cage should be at least 16" wide to avoid problems turning.

Bearded Dragons like to bask on rocks, and they use the edges of rocks to shed their skin. It is important that there is at least one or two good "basking rocks" in the Dragon's habitat. **Paradise Pet Centre** carries quality Exoterra Heat Wave Rocks for this purpose. In addition to basking and shedding, the other reason for having at least one large rock in the Dragon's habitat is to successfully simulate its natural habitat. Most Bearded Dragons come from desert environments, which get cooler by night. Bearded Dragons like a rock they can burrow under to sleep for the night, to give them shade and coolness. In addition to rocks, Bearded Dragons need things to hide, burrow, and play in. Holey logs, sold in our pet store, are ideal for this. Caves or shelters should be sized according to the individual Beardie.

Bearded Dragons also need proper lighting. A UVB light is needed, with three options being available. Fluorescent bulbs, compact fluorescents or mercury vapor bulbs. An example of a good brand of fluorescent bulbs is Repti-Sun 10.0, which needs to be 6-10 inches away. These bulbs need to be replaced every 6 months. For mercury vapor bulbs we recommend the Exoterra or Zoomed. They each are the same output and are 3-4x stronger than the best fluorescent. A 100 watt should be 10-12 inches away minimum, the 160 should be 16-18" minimum and the other wattages should be listed when you buy it. They last 6-12 months. Without a good UVB your Dragon will develop MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease) and not eat much.

For basking, Beardies need bright white light. If a colored bulb is used, they will eat less and seem sick.

Temperature is another important health factor. A Dragon needs correct temperature to digest, so a good thermometer is essential. Exoterra and Flukers are two good brands recommended. Temps need to be 95-110F during day and minimum 70F at night.

## DIET

Bearded Dragons are opportunistic omnivores. A typical diet for captive Bearded Dragons includes ample quantities of leafy greens and vegetables, and regular meals of feeder insects, such as crickets, silkworms, waxworms and butterworms. The **mealworm** has a fairly hard chitin (exoskeleton) and is generally low in the "chitin to meat" ratio. The chitin is hard enough to compact Bearded Dragons' digestion system, and **can lead to death**. Superworms are a better choice for older lizards, especially after the insect molts. The insects being offered should not be any larger than the space between the lizard's eyes to ensure safe digestion. Soft bodied worms are an exception to this rule but do not feed anything that seems too big to get down. A significant portion of the Bearded Dragon's diet must consist of leafy greens. Dragons enjoy many types of readily available greens, including: collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, dandelion greens, beans, parsley, kale and carrot tops. It is also recommended that this portion of the Dragon's diet be supplemented with a variety of finely diced fruits, vegetables and legumes. Feeding a mixture of these plants ensures a wider variety of nutrients, and variations in texture to aid digestion.

.Before being offered to the Dragon, it is recommended that insects be fed for at least 24 hours in advance, or "gut-loaded" to increase their nutritional value. Commercial cricket foods for

gut-loading are available. Insects caught in the wild are not recommended, due to the increased risk of pesticide exposure and parasites, and fireflies are fatal to Bearded Dragons, and most other animals due to their Bioluminescencechemicals, what makes them light up. It is also highly recommended that any insects being fed to the lizard first be dusted with a commercial calcium supplement, as Bearded Dragons are susceptible to metabolic bone disease if their calcium and vitamin D3 requirements are not met.

It should be noted that in captivity hatchlings are commonly fed pinhead crickets dusted with calcium and or multivitamin supplements. As they age the diet of a Bearded Dragon shifts gradually to leafy green veggies, fruit and other plant matter, but be warned things like Avocado and Rhubarb are highly TOXIC to Bearded Dragons.

## FAQ'S

### **Do Bearded Dragons make good pets?**

Bearded dragons do make good pets if you can give them the time and care. As any other animal before purchasing, we highly recommend researching the animal before purchasing. This way you will see if it fits into your lifestyle as well as your home. If you live in an apartment, or are renting, you should always check with your landlord if it is a reptile friendly building.

### **How long do Bearded Dragons live?**

The lifespan for a bearded dragon is roughly about eight years but if properly cared for can be up to 20 years.

### **How often should my Bearded Dragon's claws be clipped?**

Clip the claws roughly twice a year or when you feel it necessary.

If you are a little nervous doing nails, you can always bring your animal down to Paradise Pet Centre and we will do it for you for a small fee.

**Can I bring my Beardie outside?**

On a nice day, with temperature **no less** than 20 degrees Celsius, you can bring it outside. Do not bring it out in its aquarium as the intensity of the sun through the glass will heat it up too much and the Beardie will die. We highly recommend getting a reptile harness for your bearded dragon and that way you have control of it at all times.

## DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE SPAN

All species are from Australia, but they have been exported worldwide and bred widely in captivity. In the wild, the various species are widely distributed throughout different regions of Australia. Beardies live on average of about 8 years but have been known to live up to 20 years with proper care.

## HANDLING

Gently scoop up your Beardie with your hand under its belly. Dragons tend to be very trusting and will not necessarily hold on as well as other lizards, so always take care to support your Beardie. They do not like being firmly held; let them rest in your palm. Since Beardies are inquisitive animals, it is always a good idea to create a controlled space in which it may do some exploring. And watch out for the jumpers. One lady e-mailed me

and told me about how her Beardie suddenly jumped off her shoulder and landed on the floor. Unfortunately, three days later the same Beardie died of internal injuries from the fall. So keep a close eye on your Beardie and never leave him unattended when out of his cage.

## **BEHAVIORS**

### **Arm waving**

This is seen in all Dragons contrary to what you may have read. It is a sign of submission. Basically what they are saying is "please calm down, I do not want trouble" or "you are the king and I am not worth the fuss." Most people believe that if you have two dragons in the same cage the one that waves is the female. This is not 100% accurate. I have seen the male's wave to the females. When two males are within sight of each other one will sometimes wave to the other.

### **Head bobbing**

For male Dragons, this simply means I am king. If two males are within sight of each other this is a must. If both males bob aggressively then a fight may result. However, in most cases, the less aggressive male will slow bob his head, while the dominant male bobs will have lots more motion. Females do a slight nod. In new studies, some herpetologists believe they also bob to judge distance.

### **Push-ups**

Sometimes females display what looks to be a push-up in response to male dragons' head bobs. Most of the time this is seen during breeding season.

### **Beard displaying**

All Beardies will display this behavior but males have much larger

beards. This is a sign of aggression or showing off for the females during breeding. Both male and female beards turn black when displayed (males are much darker and some times the darkness spreads down to their shoulders). I have also noticed they display their beards when shedding to help break the skin loose. Also, dragons do what we call "morning exercises." They puff up their beards in the morning as a way of stretching.

### **Digging**

It's a fact of life - Dragons dig. They may dig a hole to sleep in, and to get out of the sun. Females dig burrows to lay eggs and this is totally normal. They may also try to dig a sleeping burrow when it's time to brumate.

### **Circling and chasing**

This is seen in fighting and breeding. Circling with the mouth open means, "I am not turning my back on you," and it could lead to biting and injuries.

### **Tail up in the air or tail twitching**

If the tail is up or twitching it usually means the Beardie is hunting. Sometimes their tail will twitch when they are watching their prey before they give chase.

### **Hissing**

Sometimes when startled, both the male & the female will display their beards, open their mouths, and make a kind of hissing noise. This is a defense warning. Don't be alarmed, Beardies will hardly ever act on their threats. It's usually all show and no bite.

### **Bath Time**

Bathing is an important part in keeping a healthy dragon. Regular bathing helps keep the beardie hydrated, clean, and helps to

relax the muscles thus making it easier for them to go to the bathroom.



Make sure that that bath water is warm to the touch (95-99° F) and fill it full enough to reach their shoulders. Remember if it feels too warm to you then it's definitely too hot for them. Some beardies are comfortable bathing in the sink or the bath tub and others may not like bath time at all. You can try placing a see through Rubbermaid container on your countertop and gently placing your beardie inside. He may feel more comfortable resting on your hand while it is submerged in the water. Or you could try rolling up a wash cloth and letting him rest his arms on it. They need to feel secure or they will never enjoy bath time. And get ready to pick your beardie out of the bath water should he decide to poop in it.

**WHEN OUT OF IT'S CAGE, NEVER LEAVE YOUR BEARDIE UNATTENDED!**