

Bearded Dragon



Other Common Name:
Inland Bearded Dragon.

Latin name: P. Vitticeps

Life span: 5 to 8 years

Size:

Babies: 4 inches

Adults: 19-23 inches

Origin: Australia

Animal Description:

With unnaturally tame demeanor & a high level of personality the bearded dragon is one of the all time favorite pets. Relatively hardy and easy to handle, best reptile for safety around children although hygiene habits such as hand washing **must** be practiced after handling.

Housing:

Baby bearded dragons can be kept in small 20 gallon long tanks. Reptile tanks are usually wider and lower in height to give the maximum floor space. Juvenile (4 months or so) and adult dragons are very active and need larger enclosures to keep them happy and healthy. Once your dragon is 10-12 inches it really needs to move up to a bigger tank. The smallest size tank a juvenile or adult can be housed in is a 40 gallon breeder tank. A pair should be kept in a minimum 75 gallon tank. Tank size can also vary according to the size of your dragons. A 24 inch male will need more space than an 18 inch male. The larger space you can give your bearded dragons the happier they will be. Males and females should be kept together **ONLY** as babies! Once they reach Juvenile age they should be separated. Males should live alone at this point, but females can usually live together. But watch closely for any dominance issues, or one of the dragons hiding too much. If one is doing poorly, then separating them will most likely help. We don't recommend keeping more than 2 females together.

You can also custom build wooden enclosures or buy specially made PVC or Melamine cages. There are many cages available on the market today that are suited well for bearded dragons. A quick search online should turn up many results. A tank will need a screened lid, not a glass one. Some companies sell special sliding ones. Most stores sell lids for standard sizes. If you can't find the size you need, you can custom build one using wood and hardware cloth.

Substrate:

What to use on the bottom of your bearded dragon cage is a highly debated topic. We keep our babies with no substrate at all. When they grow to 10 inches or more they

can be introduced to a substrate if you wish. You can use paper towels, newspaper, washed play sand, outdoor carpeting (without loops for the toes to get stuck in), reptile carpet, non-adhesive, non-slip shelf liner or what we use at Sunshine Dragons, indented Kraft paper. It comes in rolls that can be cut to size for your cage. It's not the best looking of the substrates but it is easy to change often. Changing your cage often will cut down on the chance of your dragon getting sick.

Some dragons ingest a lot of sand while eating. If you notice this you may want to feed your dragon in a separate feeding container.

The best place to get sand in at your local home improvement store because it is far cheaper than anywhere else. Buy a 50 lb bag of washed and screened play sand, or 2 bags for large tanks. Fill the tank with a couple of inches of sand. This will allow you to anchor rocks and branches into the sand, and also most beardies like to dig. Most substrates such as Calci-Sand, walnut shells, and lizard litter sold at pet stores can harm your pet.

Furniture:

You want your beardies to be happy but try not to go overboard and crowd the cage. Remember that furnishing takes up space and so you want the furnishings to be functional. Branches large enough for the beardedie to lie on are good to get your pet near his basking site. If your cage is tall find a way to use the space up high. Beardies love to climb up high. Hemp rope can be wound tightly around to make the branches easier to grip. Rocks are also wonderful because they warm up from the lights. Make sure the rocks are stable and that your beardedie can't dig under them and hurt themselves. You can also include real or artificial plants. Ponytail palms, snake plants, jade, and pothos, all seem to work well. Make sure they are free of chemicals because your beardedie might eat them. Be prepared to replace them as they can be hard on the plants. You do want a hiding spot for your beardedie as they LOVE to hide. Half logs that are sold in pet stores work well (get a large one since they grow fast) and so do flower pots turned on their sides. Be creative. It can be a low space. They like to squeeze in places.

Cleaning the Cage:

You will need to scoop the feces out of the cage daily. You can use a small cup. I take some of the sand from around the poop also to keep the cage cleaner. The sand should be changed about once a month depending on the size of the enclosure and the number of beardies. A small cage with 2 dragons will have to be changed much more than a large cage with one dragon.

When emptied, the tank should be scrubbed with soapy water, Nolvasan, or a very diluted bleach Solution (10% bleach, 90% water). It needs to be rinsed off well and dried. Nolvasan is a veterinary disinfectant that can be bought online at www.beanfarm.com. The generic version is chlorhexadine diacetate and is cheaper. Nolvasan needs to be diluted so a gallon will last forever. It also will not leave any smell as bleach can if not properly rinsed. No matter what you use make sure you soak all rocks, branches, and other things in the cage in the cleaner and then rinse and dry well. Make sure the food bowls are washed in soapy water daily.

Lighting and Heating:

You will need two types of lighting, **UVB and heat lighting**, UVB light is essential for many kinds of reptiles. The bulbs simulate the sun allowing the dragons to produce Vitamin D3 which helps them metabolize the calcium they need to maintain health. Without UVB many reptile get Metabolic Bone Disease. We use special reptile florescent bulbs like the Reptisun 5.0 or the Reptisun 10.0, they come in different lengths. The new Reptisun 10.0 is better in tall cages as it gives off more UVB. It is also useful with a screen lid, as the screen does block out some of the UVB light. We get our bulbs www.bigappleherp.com for a much lower price then in a pet store.

These lights need to be within 12 inches of the basking spot and need to be replaced every 6 months because the amount of UVB diminishes. There is a new type of light called a mercury vapor light, some popular brands being T-Rex's Active UVHeat, Zoo Med's Powersun, Or Mega-Ray. These combine UVB and heat in one bulb. We don't use these bulbs, as our cages are not high enough to accommodate them. They are also very expensive and have been known to break easily. There is also some controversy whether they are safe. Research the two types and make your own decision on what is best for you. For heat you can use your standard household bulbs, reptile basking bulbs, or standard spot lights. If you need larger then 100 watts you can find 150 and 200 watts at home improvement stores. In a taller cage a spot light or basking bulb is best to make sure your basking spot is warm enough. Standard light bulbs work well in cages that are low in height.

Make sure the bulbs are over what will be your dragons basking spot. This should be at one end of the cage. This area needs to be between 100-110 degrees. Babies usually need a warmer spot than adults. Beardies need this heat to be able to digest their food. Use a thermometer like this one in the cage to monitor temps or better yet, buy a **non contact** temp gun and use it to check your temps frequently. The cooler side of the tank away from the basking site should be around 75-80. At night you should not need heating unless it goes below 65 degrees. Then you can use special night heat lights or under tank heater attached to a thermostat on low. Without the thermostat the under tank heater will be really hot.

Your lights should be on a cycle of about 10-14 hours on in the summer and 10-12 hours on in the winter. We prefer to keep them as close to what is happening here. You can regulate the lights with simple timers.

Feeding:

Leafy greens must be offered daily. Greens include mustard greens, collard greens, turnip greens, dandelions, escarole, chicory, and arugula can be staples in their diet. Lettuce doesn't have much nutritional value and should not make up their whole diet or even a large part. Romaine could be given occasionally if you can't find the other greens. Spinach, kale, and Swiss chard are both high in oxalic acids that bind calcium. They can be given, just not too frequently. Variety is a good idea though. Remember, you don't have to buy the whole huge bunch of greens. They will weigh whatever you separate out of a big bunch. This is a good way to get a big variety without buying too many greens. Make sure you wash all the veggies to get any pesticides off. Remove large stems (like collard stems), and any rotten parts and then rip the greens into pieces about the size of your dragons head. We cut up all our greens at once and place them in a Tupperware

container lined with paper towels. This should last about a week in the fridge. Before feeding make sure to rinse the greens you are going to give to your dragon that day if you haven't done it before. Also wetting the greens before giving them to your dragon is a great way to get extra water into them.

Vegetables like winter squashes, green beans, parsnips, carrots, sweet potato, and others can be grated up and added to the salad. They need to be in chopped very small or grated pieces. Dragons can not chew large chunks and it will be hard for them to digest. Fruits such as all the berries, mango, papaya, grapes, can be added in a small amount. Offering greens in the morning before they get insects is a good way to make sure they eat their vegetables.

Water:

We do not provide water dishes for our dragons. We find they either defecate in it, the crickets drown in it, or they just kick up sand into it. You can wet their greens when you feed them. You also should mist them with a spray bottle daily or put them in the tub weekly. Make sure the beardies can stand in the water so they don't have to swim the whole time. Make the water lukewarm. Make sure to watch them while in the water. They really seem to enjoy bath time. Some dragons will drink from a spray bottle. A light spray dripped on their nose will usually run into their mouth. It's tricky to figure out, but once you do most dragons will drink this way.

Insects:

Insects should be offered to babies two or three times a day and to juveniles and adults daily. As your beardedie gets older he or she should be eating less and less insects and more vegetables. Too many insects all through their life will cause kidney damage. Veggies should make up about 10-25% of hatchlings diet and about 50% or more of adults diets. You can feed insects such as crickets and silkworms as a staple. Mealworms and wax worms are high in fat and not recommended. We choose not to give our beardies pinky mice because of the risk of parasites from them. Also they are high in fat and most dragons do not need them. Instead we use silkworms and super worms to fatten them up after hibernation and for the egg laying females. Silkworms are also a yummy option to crickets. They eat them up like candy. Giving them as many crickets as they can eat in a 5-10 minute period is a good idea. Many baby dragons will eat 25-50 crickets in a sitting. Never leave crickets in the cage overnight, especially with babies. They can seriously hurt babies by munching on them as food. Some people choose to feed their beardies in a separate tank to avoid this. Never give babies large crickets. They need to be no bigger than the space between their eyes. Serious harm can be caused by hatchlings eating large crickets. **NEVER FEED FIRE FLIES – THEY ARE TOXIC TO YOUR DRAGON AND WILL CAUSE DEATH**

Supplementation:

Dust insects with a calcium with D3 (Rep-Cal) vitamin daily or whenever live insects are offered. We put the crickets in a large yogurt container and shake them up with the vitamin dust and then serve them to the beardies. They get very excited when they see this container. About 2 times a week you should dust with a multivitamin instead of the calcium.

Vet Exams:

Finding a good reptile vet is the first thing you should do when you get your dragon. Bearded dragons can get many kinds of parasites and when left untreated can kill your pet. Taking a fecal sample in is the cheapest way to solve this problem. Ask if they will check the sample without seeing the dragon first. Many will do this but will not give out meds until the reptile is seen. Finding a good reptile vet in your area is not always easy but is necessary. Check out this site for a good list of vets: Anapsid.org. If you live local to us please email us for a reference to the vet we use and love!

Almost all reptiles carry salmonella naturally. Make sure adults and children wash their hands after contact with your dragons and make sure you don't wash your reptile dishes with your dishes.

Recommended reading:

The Bearded Dragon Manual, Philippe de Vosjoli, Robert Mailloux,
Susan Donoghue, V.M.D., Roger Klingenberg, D.V.M,
Jerry Cole. 2001 Advanced Vivarium Systems Inc.