



## Care of the Australian Bearded Dragon

Native to the Australian desert, bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) are members of the family Agama. They commonly attain a length of 2 feet (including the tail). Males tend to grow larger than females and have larger heads. Bearded dragons typically live 8-10 years. Sexual maturity is reached between 8-18 months, although sexual activity may begin before 12 months of age.

### \*Diet

Bearded dragons are omnivores. Variety is the key to good nutrition and foods offered should include:

- Vegetable matter, offered as a chopped salad, should make up approximately 50-55% of the adult dragon diet.
  - o Dark leafy greens (such as collard greens, kale, romaine, dandelion, turnip greens, mustard greens, beet greens, Swiss chard, spinach, chicory, escarole)
  - o Other chopped or grated vegetables may comprise up to 20% of the diet (squash, zucchini, sweet potato, broccoli, peas, carrot, beans, okra, bean sprouts, tofu).
- Animal matter should make up approximately 25% of the adult dragon diet.
  - o Appropriately sized crickets (body length no greater than the width of the dragon's head), earthworms, grasshoppers, superworms (Zophobas), wax worms, locusts
  - o Pinky mice occasionally
  - o Avoid lightning bugs, as they can be toxic.
- Fruit should make up no more than 5% of the diet and should include nutrient dense items such as papaya, melon, and banana.
- Offer non-toxic flower blossoms such as hibiscus as occasional treats.

### \*Vitamin-Mineral Supplementation

Bearded dragons require vitamin/mineral supplementation.

- Lightly dust all food items with a calcium carbonate or calcium gluconate supplement (without phosphorus or vitamin D). An easy and thorough way to dust food items is to place both food and supplement in a plastic bag and shake vigorously. Dust prey for baby bearded dragons daily. The frequency of dusting should decrease as your dragon ages.
- When feeding live insects be sure to offer "gut loaded" insects (= give food rich in calcium to the insects before offering them to your dragon).
- Offer a reptile multi-vitamin approximately once/twice monthly.

### \*Water



Although bearded dragons thrive in low humidity environments, drinking water should always be provided in a shallow bowl or saucer. Dragons will often soak and defecate in their water bowl so clean water dishes at least once daily.

### \*Housing

Bearded dragons may be housed in small groups of one male and a few females. Dragons housed together should be of similar size with plenty of space available.

#### Enclosure

- An adult bearded dragon minimally requires a 238 L vivarium although a larger enclosure is recommended.
- A screen top is recommended to allow proper ventilation, prevent escape and protect your dragon from other pets.
- Bearded dragons require hiding areas (rock cave, plant pot, cardboard box, etc.) as well as thick branches upon which to climb and bask.
- The cage substrate must be easily cleaned and non-toxic.
  - o Use newspaper or butcher paper to line the cage floor.
  - o Astroturf is fine as long as it is kept clean and dry.
  - o Avoid sand, gravel or corncob bedding because they may cause gastrointestinal blockage if ingested.

### \*Heat

Proper temperature is very important. The daytime cage temperature gradient should range from 27-31°C, with a basking (hot) spot around 33-35°C. The basking area should consist of an overhead heat lamp (controlled with a thermostat) and a branch that slopes upward so that the animal can select its desired temperature. Take care that the bulb cannot come in contact with your dragon.

**Hot rocks are NOT recommended since serious burns may arise secondary to short circuits.**

Place thermometers at both ends of the cage. Place the thermometers at levels consistent with where your dragon spends most of its time.

### \*Lighting

Ultraviolet light is needed for normal absorption of dietary calcium. Provide a synthetic UV light source for your bearded dragon. Be sure to choose a bulb specifically designed for reptile use that emits light in the UVB range of 290-320 nm. UV rays are filtered by glass and plastic therefore natural light and artificial light must not pass through glass or plastic.

The UVB spectrum generally degrades after about 6 months; therefore bulbs should be replaced every 6 months. Consider exposing your pet to direct sunlight when outside temperatures exceed 75-80°F (24-27°C).

#### References:

- [Lafebervet.com](http://Lafebervet.com)
- *Reptile Medicine and Surgery* - Stephen J. Divers, Douglas R. Mader