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CARING FOR YOUR BEARDED DRAGON

Bearded Dragons make great pets and are easily cared for. They often have social personalities and tend to be more interactive than smaller reptiles. Being diurnal (awake during the day) gives them more time to interact with their owner.

Brief history:

There are 9 species of bearded dragons, all from Australia. The most common species kept as pets is the *Pogona vitticeps*. Through selective breeding they now come in a variety of colors, skin types, and sizes as illustrated below. They prefer hot arid climates and are very good climbers and can be found climbing rocks and tree branches. Never cut a bearded dragon's toenails as this will put them at risk for falling off perching sites. Adult bearded dragons range in size from 4 – 24 inches (nose to tip of tail) depending on species.

Color		Skin type
Red 	White 	Normal 
Orange 	Albino 	Leatherback 
Yellow 	Multi 	Silkback 

Housing:

The housing requirements for bearded dragons can vary depending on the size of the dragon. The following are some basic requirements for all dragons.

- Terrariums work best and should be comprised of solid walls and top to help trap heat and humidity.
 - o The cage should be at least 3 times the dragons length (nose to tail tip) and as wide as they are long. For instance, a 10 in long dragon needs a cage that is a minimum of 10 inches wide and 30 inches long.
 - o Cage height is also important as bearded dragons are adept climbers. Be aware that the taller the cage the longer the UV light reach must be. Some lights will only reach 5 inches while others will reach up to 18 inches. Read the light packaging carefully before purchasing.
- Substrate (cage floor covering)
 - o Artificial turf makes good flooring as it is easy to clean and can't be eaten.
 - o Avoid sand, gravel, corn cob, small wood chips, etc as they can be eaten and cause impaction.
 - o Feces should be scooped weekly and substrate changed when soiled.
- Temperature
 - o Heat lamps should be 18 inches above the bearded dragon to prevent burns. Night heat lamps should produce little to no light.
 - o Hot rocks can cause burns through direct contact and should be used with caution.
 - o If your dragon likes hiding places, use plants or rocks for them to hide behind but avoid caves or hide boxes as these will limit their exposure to UV light.
 - o Air temperature should be measured at both ends of the cage
 - Ideal daytime: 95-100°F on the warm side, 85°F on the cooler side
 - Ideally at least 75-80°F at night
- Lighting
 - o Should be provided for 12-14 hours daily using both white light and full spectrum UV light. (Recommended brands: Reptisun (by Zoo med) and Reptile D-light).
 - o The UV light source should be within 18 inches of the bearded dragon and should be changed every 6-8 months.

Feeding:

- 25-50% of the diet should consist of insects such as silkworms, earthworms, and gut loaded crickets (feed crickets a high calcium diet for 2 days prior to feeding to your bearded dragon).
 - o Juveniles are more carnivorous and need more protein and calcium for growth
 - o Avoid mealworms as they are nutritionally poor.
- 25% of diet should be commercial dragon food pellets
 - o if not available then can use juvenile iguana food
 - o if not eating pellets then try crushing them and sprinkling them onto other foods
- Vegetables and fruit should comprise remainder of diet.
 - o Dark leafy greens (ie spinach, collards, kale) and dandelions
 - o Avoid iceberg lettuce as it is nutritionally poor
 - o Use calcium rich veggies
 - o Should regularly eat 8-10 different vegetables and fruits
 - o An adults diet should be 50% vegetables.
- If unable to feed commercial pelleted diets then sparingly use a balanced vitamin + mineral supplement.
 - o Never mix products.
 - o Use a tiny pinch on food once weekly.
 - o Reptocal and Reptivite have balanced formulas.
- Water should be available at all times and should be in a shallow (to prevent accidental drowning) heavy bowl that can't be tipped over.