

CARE OF LIZARDS IN CAPTIVITY

SOME GUIDELINES

Information for the Pet Reptile Owner

We see many lizards in the Hospital. The most common is the green iguana. If cared for properly, these reptiles can grow to six feet and live for 12 to 15 years.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Iguanas require special effort to meet their body's needs in terms of nutrition, temperature, humidity and lighting.

Most people use an aquarium. A high sided 20 gallon one is a good beginning, although a larger one may be necessary. The terrium should be at least as wide as the lizard is long. The terrium's length should be twice as long as the lizard.

Most lizards sleep up to ten hours per day so the lighting must allow at least ten hours of darkness. Temperatures should be kept at 75-80 degrees Fahrenheit at night and 85-90 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. An accurate thermometer is very helpful. A more efficient way to allow these cold-blooded creatures to self-regulate their body temperature is as follows.

One way to allow the lizard to self-regulate its body temperature is to divide the aquarium into 'zones'. One-third of the aquarium is 'hot'; one-third is 'medium'; one-third is 'cool'. The 'hot' side is where the heat source is. You can use lamps, under the cage warmers or hot rocks. Be careful of hot rocks, the electrical wiring can short out and produce a very 'hot' spot that may burn your reptile. The goal is to have the lizard spend most of the time in the 'medium' zone. That way it can move to the 'hot' or 'cool' zones as needed to regulate its body temperature. If the lizard is spending most of the time in the 'cool' zone, then the aquarium is too hot overall. If the lizard is spending most of the time in the 'hot' zone, then the aquarium is too cool overall. Make appropriate changes in the heat source to compensate. The 'medium' zone should contain the water (in a large enough container to soak in) and the food. Spraying your lizard can help maintain its hydration. Use fresh water and spray several times a week. You may need to do this more often in the dry winter months.

The lining to the cage should be easy to clean or change, non-abrasive and economical. Newspaper fits all these requirements. When the sheet is soiled, discard it. Astroturf-like materials can be used, but they need to be washed in bleach frequently to maintain hygiene. Larger lizards may do better in an organic cellulose fiber animal bedding (Shepherd Specialty Papers, Kalamazoo, MI).

Lizards need a source of ultraviolet light to activate Vitamin D3 in their skin. Vitamin D3 is used to maintain strong bones. Natural sunlight and/or fluorescent ultraviolet light (such as Vita-lite) should be available twelve to thirteen hours a day. Most high quality reptile vitamins will contain Vitamin D3. If possible, check the expiration date and get the freshest batch available.



Exotic and Bird Clinic of New Hampshire
91 North Stark Highway
Weare, New Hampshire
(603) 529 - 4999

'Hide' boxes are boxes in which the lizard can have visual security. Small cardboard boxes with an access hole will suffice for most lizards. If the lizard does not use it, try varying the shape, size or type of hide box.

DIET

Diet induced problems are the number one cause of disease in the lizards we see here at the Hospital. ***Lettuce is not an appropriate diet for an iguana!***

There are a variety of good quality iguana diets on the market today. We carry Zupreem Iguana diet but pet stores will also carry comparable brands. You want a 'complete, balanced' diet.

If feeding these commercial foods, the recommendation is for this to make up eighty percent of the diet. The other twenty percent should be of plant materials such as dark green or yellow vegetables or citrus fruits (berries, apples, pears, peaches, plums, etc.). Once your lizard has reached about two feet in length, the percentages of these portions should be changed to 50:50.

Animal sources of protein are available such as earthworms, crickets, mealworms, cooked egg, cottage cheese, yogurt or hard cheeses can be used also. If using these as the sole source of protein, feed at twenty to thirty percent of the diet with a variety of plant material making up the rest.

Complete vitamin and mineral supplements are a must. Use reptile vitamins that contain Vitamin D3.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

There are a variety of books written about care of lizards. There are also herpetological societies where you can become a member and these societies publish handbooks, etc. for their members. One such society is the Chicago Herpetological Society (write to: Membership Secretary, Chicago Herpetological Society, 2001 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60614) which publishes information on reptiles.



Exotic and Bird Clinic of New Hampshire
91 North Stark Highway
Weare, New Hampshire
(603) 529 - 4999