Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Leopard Tortoise Care

Please note these care sheets are intended for the average reptile owner to ensure that your pet is receiving basic care needed to have a healthy life and there are other aspects of advanced care that can be considered for healthy pets.

Brief Description
Leopard tortoises *(Stigmochelys pardalis)* are the second largest tortoise native to Africa growing to 18-24" in shell length. There are two subspecies with differing shell patterns and shapes. Leopard tortoises are known for their beautiful and distinctive patterning on their shell and friendly personalities.



Sexing
Tortoises have to be mature (at least 5-8 years old) before you can determine sex. Once mature, the males will have longer tails than the females, and the plastron (bottom part of the shell) will often be concave.

Lifespan
With proper care the average expected lifespan is 60-80 years on average.

Caging
Tortoises need large enclosures and should be in a 40-gallon tank or larger just as youngsters. Adults require much large, at least 6 feet in length. An outdoor enclosure safe from predators or escape attempts is very beneficial when weather permits. Large containers such as Rubbermaid storage boxes or livestock troughs can also be used for enclosures successfully and inexpensively. There should be one or two things for your tortoise to hide under – rock cave, half log (least favorite option), half buried clay pot, etc. Outdoor pens will need to be secure to keep tortoises in and predators (especially dogs) out.

Substrate
Tortoises should be able to make shallow burrows in the substrate so a mixture of several of the following is best: organic soil, coco coir, peat moss, sphagnum moss, dead leaves. Cypress mulch can be used successfully although it typically quite dry and dusty. Avoid cedar/pine/aspen mulches, sand, carefresh bedding, alfalfa pellets, and sand. Live plants can be planted directly in the substrate or kept in pots to provide cover and enrichment for your tortoise.

Lighting and Temperature
Reptiles need a warm place to bask (**90-95 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**70-80 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at the same level of the pet in the basking area to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 65 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

Tortoises MUST have UVB light to survive and a lack of UVB will lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, severe illness, and death. A bulb that specifically provides UVB is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic, so having the cage near a window is not adequate. T5 or T8 Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 or Arcadia 12% are the preferred high quality brands. After about 6 months of use the bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

Humidity
Humidity in the enclosure should be 50-60%. This should be measured by a hygrometer.

Water
A shallow water dish at least as big as your tortoise with fresh water must be available at all times. It should be stable, so it cannot be spilled, and it should be easy to climb in and out of from all sides. The dishes used under potted plants are excellent for water dishes and inexpensive. Tortoises enjoy full body soakings but often defecate in their water so it needs to be cleaned often.

Food

Tortoises are herbivores and need a variety of high quality vegetables and grasses. Grasses ideally should be the mainstay of your tortoise's diet and can be grown in the enclosure itself or in shallow dishes (like pie plates) and then offered to your tortoise to graze on. Fruit and a few Mazuri tortoise pellets (soaked in water until mushy) can be offered once or twice a week in addition to vegetables. Uneaten food should be removed after 24 hours. The following is a short list of commonly used food.

Staple Ingredients (Highest in calcium and other nutrients)					
Fresh grasses: *Bermuda, wheatgrass, fescue, bluegrass, orchardgrass, buffalo grass*					
					
Collard Greens	Turnip Greens	Mustard Greens	Escarole	Endive	Dandelion

Good Ingredients for treats – should be less than 10% of the diet					
					
Sweet Potato	Cactus Pads	Yellow Squash	Butternut Squash	Kale	Flowers

Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens)
Cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards).

Supplementation

A powdered calcium supplement (without phosphorus) should be used lightly sprinkled over the food 1-2 times weekly. A multivitamin can be used less frequently (once or twice a month) if desired but with good nutrition this is not always necessary. A piece of cuttlebone in the enclosure will provide calcium and keep the beak short.

Hibernation

Leopard tortoises cannot hibernate and should remain within appropriate temperature ranges throughout the year. Heating sources should be used during colder seasons to maintain appropriate environment. Attempts to hibernate will quickly cause illness and death in this species.