Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Tegu 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

Tegus *(*Salvator *species)* are large lizards from tropical to sub-tropical South America. They have recently gained in popularity in the pet trade due to their impressive size and how closely they tend to bond with their caretakers. Owning tegus can become an expensive adventure given their large size and typically voracious appetite. They are not recommended as a beginner reptile, but provided the correct husbandry, you will be hard pressed to find such an intelligent and impressive companion.



Lifespan

When tegus are given appropriate care, they can easily live 15-20 years.

Sexing

Young tegus show no visual differences as hatchlings or juveniles. As they reach sexual maturity at around 3 years old, males tend to be larger with significantly larger heads/jowels, and hemipene bulges can sometimes be seen at the base of the tail behind the hind legs. The most reliable way to differentiate the sexes is by having your tegu probed by a reliable reptile veterinarian.

Caging

Tegus grow rapidly so you will need to plan appropriately for housing that provides what your tegu needs at different stages of its life. Hatchlings start around 6-9 inches and a 40 gallon will temporarily provide your hatchling enough space to thermoregulate and move about. Adult tegus will require a minimum space of 3 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet. Most tegu owners end up making custom cages out of wood in order to provide their space requirements and maintain temperatures and humidity. Sturdy branches can be used as cage furniture, but securing any cage furniture is a requirement for these strong and active lizards.

Substrate

Tegus love to dig and providing them with a deep layer of substrate to do so is an important part of their care by allowing them to behave as they would in their native habitats. A mixture of coconut coir, sand, and mulch will help to maintain humidity and will hold its shape as your tegu burrows and digs. Taking steps to ensure that your tegu's substrate doesn't become too wet will reduce the risk of bacterial and fungal growth. Contaminated or dirtied substrate should be replaced. Substrates of newspaper or butcher paper work well for quarantine periods or if your tegu is sick.

Lighting and Temperature

Tegus need a warm place to bask (**100-105 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**75-80 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage at the level of the animal 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 70 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

UVB lighting is highly recommended. 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

Tegus come from humid environments and dehydration can frequently be a problem for captive tegus. Maintaining humidity around 75-90% in their enclosures will help to prevent problems. Misting a couple times a day should help keep humidity around these levels without allowing the substrate to become saturated.

Water
Tegus will require a large water bowl for soaking. Rubbermaid bins may become the easiest solution for fully grown tegus. The water will need to be changed frequently to keep it clean of substrate and feces.

Food
Tegus are true omnivores and variety ensures appropriate nutrition. Diets that are too high in fat and protein will lead to obesity and shorten the life of your tegu. 60% of your tegu's diet should be made of high quality proteins, which includes insects, especially as hatchlings and juveniles. Crickets and dubia roaches are great nutritionally and provide enrichment and exercise. Make sure to gutload any feeder insects with fresh produce and dark leafy greens. Commercially available canned snails, are relished in addition to hardboiled egg, lean ground turkey, superworms, pinky mice, boiled chicken, or premium canned dog or cat food – these should be a small percentage of the diet to avoid obesity however. Approximately 30% of your tegu's diet should be made up of vegetables and dark, leafy greens. The last 10% of your tegu's diet can be made up of fruit including raspberries, strawberries, bananas, blueberries, melon, or papaya.

60% High Quality Protein				
 Crickets	 Dubia Roaches	 Superworms	 Egg	 Dog Food
 Snails/slugs	 Worms	 Chicken/Turkey	 Pinky mice	 Chicks

30% Vegetables and Dark Leafy Greens (also use for gutloading the insects)					
 Collard Greens	 Dandelion	 Turnip Greens	 Butternut Squash	 Sweet Potato	 Yellow Squash

10% Fruit, Flowers					
 Papaya	 Berries	 Mango	 Apple	 Bananas	 Flowers

Gutloading
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and/or dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list above, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

Supplementation
A powdered calcium supplement (without phosphorus) should be used to lightly coat feeder insects. Calcium and vitamin supplementation is not needed for whole prey items like mice or chicks.