Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Greek 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



The Greek Tortoise *(Testudo graeca)*, otherwise known as the spur-thighed tortoise, is a popular pet due to its small size and interactive personality. One of several Mediterranean species, almost all available Greek Tortoises are wild caught as young adults (10-20 years old) and then imported for sale in the US. Unfortunately after being taken from the wild tortoises often have trouble adapting to captivity and die premature deaths from inadequate care. When scared tortoises will withdraw their body into their shell and their armored front legs will protect their head. The shell is living tissue and should never be pierced or painted.

Lifespan

With proper care the average expected lifespan is 40-80 years on average.

Sexing

Determining gender can be difficult, especially with young tortoises. The males will have longer tails the females and once mature the plastron (bottom part of the shell) will be concave.

Caging

Tortoises need large enclosures and should be in a 75 gallon tank or larger, or outdoor enclosure 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 – fake 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. 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 turtle.

Lighting and Temperature

Reptiles need a warm place to bask (**85-90 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (70-**75 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 60 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 40-60%. 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 like Repashy Calcium Plus 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 help keep the beak short.

Hibernation
Greek Tortoises do hibernate in their natural environments but in captivity it is a debated topic. Since most tortoises are kept indoors they are often not hibernated due to the risks. If kept indoors and warm temperatures are maintained then hibernation is not necessary.

Examples of good indoor enclosures:



