Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Bearded Dragon 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
Native to the arid regions of Australia, bearded dragons *(Pogona vitticeps)* are popular pets in captivity due to their docile nature and fairly basic care requirements compared to other reptiles. Adults can get up to two feet in length. There are several color morphs available like citrus, tangerine, and reds, and then several based on their scale texture as well.



Lifespan
With good care the average lifespan is about 8-10 years.

Sexing
Determining the gender of your bearded dragon can be difficult, especially as juveniles. Beard color is not a reliable indicator. Both males and females may bob their heads. If you look at the underside of the tail just past the vent males should have two bulges side by side where the hemipenes (reproductive organs) sit in the base of the tail. Females will not have this. Males also tend to have larger femoral pores as adults that can fill with waxy substance (normal).

Caging
- Juveniles: 20 gallon tank is the minimum but the bigger the better.
- Adults: 40 gallon tank is the minimum but the bigger the better.
- One bearded dragon per cage!

Substrate
- Newspaper, artificial turf like reptile carpet, flat stones or no floor covering are best, especially for beginners.
- Sand, bark, or mulch should be avoided in most cases. While these substrates can provide opportunities for digging, burrowing, and other natural behaviors they should be avoided by inexperienced bearded dragon keepers due to the problems they can cause like excessive ingestion, impaction, and obstruction.
- A flat rock under the basking light will warm evenly and provide a good basking spot.

Lighting and Temperature
Reptiles 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 (**75-85 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.

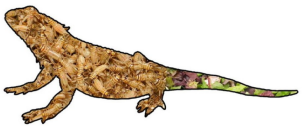
Bearded dragons MUST have UVB light to survive and a lack of UVB will lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, severe illness, and death. A bulb that specifically provides UVB is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic, so having the cage near a window is not adequate. T5 or T8 Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 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 tank should be 30-40% and should be monitored by a hygrometer. Inadequate humidity will affect your reptile's ability to shed its skin properly and can cause health problems.

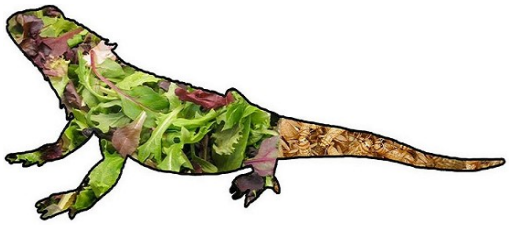
Water
A shallow water dish with fresh water must be available at all times. With the low humidity in Colorado the addition of a water dish is absolutely not a concern for excessive humidity. It should also be stable, so it cannot be spilled, and it should be easy to climb in and out of from all sides. The dishes used under potted plants are excellent for water dishes and inexpensive. Vitamin drops do not need to be added to the water.

Food

Bearded dragons eat a combination of live insects and vegetables every day when young, and every other day as adults. The best insects to use are crickets or dubia roaches which can be gutloaded (see below). Other live insects that can be included in your bearded dragon's diet are superworms, hornworms, and silkworms. Wax worms and mealworms should only be given as a treat because of the high fat content and low digestibility. The general rule is to feed bearded dragons crickets no larger than the distance between their eyes. Vegetables are a very important part of a bearded dragon's diet. See the list below of vegetables to use.



Juveniles eat a higher ratio of insects to veggies



Adults eat a higher ratio of veggies to insects

Staple Ingredients for Beardies and Gutloading Insects (Highest in calcium and other nutrients)					
					
Collard Greens	Turnip Greens	Mustard Greens	Escarole	Endive	Dandelion

Good Ingredients for Gutloading Insects – less than 25% of the diet					
					
Sweet Potato	Papaya	Kale	Butternut Squash	Berries	Mango
Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow					

Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens)
Idaho potatoes, cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, canned or dried insects, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards). While convenient, some commercially available gutloads (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition.

Gutloading and Supplementation

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. 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. A powdered calcium supplement like Repashy Calcium Plus should be used to lightly coat the crickets 3-4 times weekly until 2 years of age and then 1-2 times weekly after that.

Brumation (semi hibernation)

Brumation is a survival tactic of slower metabolism and reduced activity in bearded dragons during colder months where food is less available. This typically starts in the fall and winter months (September through February) and can last from a few weeks to a few months. During this time they usually try to go to cooler side of cage and hide or sleep during the day even despite keeping normal temperatures and offering food. It is not recommended to allow full brumation - continue to offer food, normal temperatures, and soak in 1" of warm water daily to stimulate appetite/activity and they usually start to come out of it in a few weeks. It is not harmful to discourage brumation, and some beardies can get sick during brumation. It is difficult to differentiate signs of illness from signs of brumation so it is important to monitor weight with a kitchen scale if they are brumating - if they lose 10% of original weight or more then it is not just brumation and more likely illness that should be addressed. Brumation-like signs occurring outside of the normal months is highly likely to be illness and a vet should be consulted.