



RUSSIAN TORTOISE

Care Guide



ENCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

Russian torts need a fair bit of space. An adult will need at minimum 6 square feet of enclosure space, using all ground space and very little vertical space. Make sure they have enough space to spread out, with walls at least 10" high, or with some sort of wire lid. Have at least one decent sized hiding spot, and they also need access to fresh water. They will frequently defecate in their water dish, so make sure it is easy to access to clean out. There are many options for what to cover the enclosure floor with. We use a combination of hay and straw and "reptibark," but other people use coconut coir substrate, or even bioactive enclosures. We do not recommend sand because of the risk of impaction.

TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY

These torts like it warm. They appreciate a temperature range of about 75-85*f across their enclosure. This can be done by over-enclosure heat fixtures. Using a ceramic heat emitter or non-white heat light is also a good option for 24hr heat. They also need a UVB light during the day. Not all lights have this! Check the packaging carefully! The UVB light is a white light that helps them absorb the calcium provided by "dusting" their food. Make sure to check if your light needs to be replaced regularly, some go "stale" after a few months. These tortoises don't need it overly humid, but when they are shedding they may appreciate a lukewarm soak to help get any remaining shed off their necks

BEHAVIOR BASICS

Russian Tortoises are slow and steady, and live forever. They are active movers and like checking out their surroundings. They eat veggies and fruits, along with the occasional protein like egg. They can be housed singly, or in pairs (except male-male, those will fight!), but care should be made to make sure any multi-housed beardedies are still getting enough food and one isn't being picked on. They aren't known escape artists, but they walk faster than most people give them credit for. They like to explore outside and around the house, but care should be taken to keep track of them so they don't get lost or go hiding. They require more "stuff" than other reptiles and active care, so if you are looking for an easy, low maintenance pet, this may not be the greatest fit, regardless of how cute they are! They also live forever, and long term planning for their care is something to consider.

HANDLING

When getting your tortoise out, grab them around the middle of their carapace. Never from the tail or head. Secure your hands under them until they have settled, but be prepared for them to "swim" in the air with their legs. You may notice them needing a nail trim if they are scrambling on your bare skin. While they can bite, they don't do it frequently out of fear, mostly just testing to see if something could be food. If your tortoise seems distressed (hissing, curled up in their shell for an extended period of time) put it back in its cage for a while to settle. Don't take them outside on chilly days, they need to stay warm!

FEEDING

Your rescue has primarily been eating fresh greens, veggies, and fruits. They like a veggie plate about 3-4x a week (dusted with calcium). This should be kept to mostly greens, some veggies, and sparingly fruit and protein. There are many lists online about safe produce, but when in doubt, if it makes people gassy, it's not good for reptiles. There are commercially available tortoise pellets, and if you choose to have those available as well, avoid the brightly dyed versions, and choose something for "grassland" tortoises.

HEALTH CONCERNS

Tortoises are pretty healthy, and are sturdy once they reach adulthood. Make sure their eyes are clear of stuck shed, and opening fully. Give them a lukewarm bath occasionally to loosen up stuck shed. If you have a baby, make sure to watch for signs of bone deformities (MBD). They may suffer from over-grown beaks if they do not have hard enough fiber in their diet to wear it down by their food. If you notice an overgrown beak, contact your vet about having a trim.