Outdoor Housing

If outdoor housing will be the primary housing, the enclosure needs to offer protection from climate extremes, protect against predators, and be escape-proof. In addition, the area should be large enough to provide room for exercise, a basking site, a shelter for sleeping, and relief from hot, sunny days. Include a removable basin for water that is large enough for the tortoise to soak in; restrict usage to once per week. A smaller container of water should be available at all times.

Use a thermometer at the tortoise level to ensure the proper temperatures are being met. Heat can be provided by an incandescent bulb (75-100 watt) or a heat lamp mounted on the interior roof of the enclosure, out of the way of the tortoise. Heated and insulated doghouses can be ideal shelters.

Herbicides and pesticides can be fatal to tortoises. If the outdoor unit is on grass, make certain no herbicides or pesticides are used. Be aware that ants, especially fire ants, can kill tortoises.

If the temperature in your geographic area falls below 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit, your tortoise should be brought indoors.

Diet

Food should be offered every other day. Vitamin and mineral supplementation should be given once or twice per week. Foods preferred by tortoises include:

Alfalfa	Aloe Vera
Apples w/o seeds	Bananas
Banana Squash	Beets
Bell Peppers	Broccoli
Brussel Sprouts	Cantaloupe
Chard Chicory	Carrots, chopped
Collard Greens	Corn
Eggplant	Escarole
Grape Leaves	Green Beans
Hibiscus	Kale
Parsley	Peaches
Spinach	Strawberries
Summer Squash	Zucchini

<u>The following foods are poisonous:</u>

Apple Seeds	Bird of Paradise
Bottlebrush	Calla Lilly
Christmas Cactus	Common Pivet
Dieffenbachia	Dogwood
English Ivy	Foxglove
Hemlock	Impatiens
Iris	Jasmine
Larkspur	Lily of the Valley
Marijuana	Milk Weed
Mistletoe	Mushrooms
Oleander	Poinsettia
Poison Ivy	Poison Oak
Poison Sumac	Pokeweed
Potato leaves	Privet
Rhododendron	Rhubarb
Sage	Snapdragon
Sweet Pea	Tomato leaves
Tulip	Verbena
Wisteria	Yew

This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available which provide in-depth information on tortoises and their care.

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Caring for Your Tortoise

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About Tortoises

While there are about 50 species of tortoises, only a few of these species are available as pets. There are federal and state laws restricting the sale, capture, and/or possession of many domestic and imported tortoises. Before you purchase or possess a tortoise, be certain of its identity and whether or not a permit is required to keep it as a pet.

Legal, captive bred species include the Red Foot, Leopard, and Sulcata Tortoises. Imported tortoises such a Mediterranean, Greek, Russian, Hinge backs, Yellow Foot, and Elongated Tortoises may be offered for sale. Rare species such as Hermanns, Burmese, Stars, and Pancakes may be obtained in very limited quantities.

There are several things to consider before acquiring a tortoise, such as:

- size and weight of the adult tortoise;
- longevity;
- climate zone of the species;
- housing requirements; and
- the amount of and types of foods consumed.

This pamphlet provides information on the optimal care guidelines for your new tortoise. Prior to purchasing your tortoise, select the necessary housing and equipment, and then introduce the tortoise to his new home.

Environment

Tortoises can originate from different climate zones throughout the world. It is imperative that you replicate your tortoise's specific natural environment as closely as possible. This includes temperature, humidity, sunlight intensity, terrain, diet, water, and seasonal changes (including microclimates). Some species inhabit a wide range of environments within a region. Since you may not know which area your tortoise is from, you may have to test a variety of options.

Temperate climates. Greeks, Hermanns and Russians come from a temperate climate and go through a moderate hibernation period. They inhabit different environs, from grasslands and forests to rocky hillsides and scrubland.

Arid climates. Sulcatas, Leopards, Stars, and Pancakes inhabit semiarid to arid environs, from grassland and rocky scrubland to barren desert. They do not hibernate, but some will burrow into the earth or under vegetation until climate conditions improve, and then enter a dormant period.

Humid climates. RedFoots, Yellowfoots. Elongated, and some Hingebacks are from humid, tropical climates. They do not hibernate.

Inside Housing

If you are planning to keep your tortoise inside, the minimum aquarium size is a 20 inch long or 30-gallon aquarium, set up as a terrarium. Alternatives to aquariums include a large plastic tub with high sides, a child's wading pool, or a large custom-made polyurethane-sealed, plywood enclosure. Keep in mind that the sides of your tortoise's home should be twice the length of your tortoise. As it grows in size, larger housing units should be provided. It is also recommended to set up an outdoor enclosure so that your tortoise can spend the appropriate time (weather permitting) in the fresh air and direct sunlight.

Your tortoise must have sunlight in order to remain in good health. An alternative is a UVB light (ultra violet) placed within a 4-foot distance from the carapace (top shell) of the tortoise. This light must be direct, not filtered through glass or plastic, as UVB rays do not penetrate through them. Exposure to sunlight or UVB bulb should be at least 10-12 hours per day. Tortoises require a higher ambient temperature than humans. The suggested range is 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit at one end of the housing unit, and 90-95 degrees Fahrenheit in the basking area. Normally a 75-watt incandescent bulb will provide the necessary heat range. Use a thermometer to gauge heat intensity. If it's too cool, it can cause respiratory problems. If it's too hot, it can cause dehydration and death.

The floor of the enclosure should be covered with a substrate material such as reptile bark chips and cypress mulch or, for some species, rabbit pellets work very well. These will allow for easy maintenance, stool removal, burrowing and proper maneuverability (walking and climbing). The substrate should be spot cleaned and turned daily removing droppings and uneaten food.
By including assorted pieces of flat rocks and wood, your tortoise will be able to keep nails trimmed. Do not build places for your tortoise to climb, however. If a tortoise rolls over onto its back, it will not be able to right itself. Exposed to direct or simulated sunlight, it may succumb to the heat.

Tortoises need shelter for sleeping and security. A large domed piece of cork bark or half of a ceramic drain tile will suffice. Make certain the shelter is large enough to accommodate the entire length and width of your pet.