



AGAVE VETERINARY CARE
AND EXOTIC ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Your Complete Bearded Dragon Care Guide

What should you expect from your first vet visits?

Reptiles are known for being slow to get sick and slow to get better, sadly bearded dragons are no exception to this rule. They can live as long as 8-10 years and are likely to both hide any symptoms and become sick at a snail's pace, making it hard to realize how much they've changed. Therefore, bearded dragons should be seen by a knowledgeable veterinarian every six months.

In addition to the physical exam, bearded dragons are also screened for intestinal parasites, checked for mites or fungal infections on the skin and examined for evidence of contagious or hereditary disease.

What kind of enclosure does your bearded dragon need?

Bearded dragons should be kept in an enclosure that is a minimum of 4ft long, 2ft wide and 2ft tall for one individual. The enclosure can be an aquarium, ideally a 75 gallon, or it can be a custom made reptile enclosure. They should be kept alone and males should not be able to see other male bearded dragons from their enclosures.

What does your dragon need in their enclosure?

When you first adopt your bearded dragon, we recommend you keep them on newspaper or paper towels for 60-90 days for quarantine. This allows you to monitor your new friend's health and check for any infections of mites or parasites. It also makes it easy to replace the bedding if they start showing symptoms. Keep in mind: reptiles are slow to get sick, slow to get better and fantastic at hiding all of those struggles! You'll need to monitor their appetite, shedding, bowel movements and activity level closely. During this time, keep their enclosure away from any other reptiles you may have and always wash your hands between handling between pets!

Once your beardie is finished with quarantine then you either keep using the same substrate or start using something else. This can be reptile carpet or slate tile. You may read that certain types of sand are good for bearded dragons due to their natural environment. We don't recommend this because ingesting sand can cause impactions, which means that the substrate gets stuck in their intestines and makes them unable to digest. If you decide to use sand, avoid

using vitamin or calcium sand. Monitor your dragon closely to make sure they aren't eating any sand and that no sand is getting into their food bowl.

What decorations and heat fixtures should you use?

Another important step is adding hides, basking areas and other enrichment items to your pet's home. First, make sure to provide a basking spot. This can be a branch or cork bark that can be climbed onto in order for them to thermoregulate. This provides your bearded dragon with some way to burn some energy and mimic wild behaviors inside the safety of your home.

Next, provide them with some places to hide. These can be with artificial hides found in pet stores or with homemade decorations. Providing hides will allow your bearded dragon to feel secure as they adjust to their new environment and sounds. If you have a female dragon then one of these hides should be a nesting box to encourage her to lay her eggs.

Another enrichment option for both you and your scaly friend are plants and rocks. You can use either fake or live plants, be careful to secure both types well to insure that your bearded dragon doesn't eat, break or drop them upon themselves. Rocks fall into a similar category. You can use either fake or real rocks. Make sure to sterilize real rocks well and secure them to a stable surface so your dragon is safe to climb on them.

You'll also need to provide a shallow water dish that your dragon can soak in. Be careful that it is not deep enough for them to drown in. Keep in mind that most bearded dragons don't drink from the bowls and you'll need to spray the enclosure every 24-48 hours to maintain the humidity at 30-60%. You can monitor the humidity level by placing a humidity probe by the cool side of the enclosure. You should also soak your dragon once a month to help with shedding and defecation.

What heat elements and temperament ranges should you have?

Heat lamps are optimal for basking spots. You can use 2 separate lamps or a duo lamp hood to provide a UVB bulb and a fluorescent heat bulb to provide the warmth. Keep in mind that UVB bulbs must be replaced every 6 months or monitored with a UV radiometer. UVB bulbs provide UV rays to reptiles which they use to make vitamin D3. The vitamin D3 allows reptiles' bodies to absorb calcium and helps prevent calcium deficiency. Without UV light, dragons are likely to develop metabolic bone disease.

Your Bearded Dragon's basking spot should reach around 95-105°F. Do not put a heating element into the cage with your bearded dragon. Reptiles often try to lay on sources of heat and can inflict severe burns on themselves in the process. This is also why we don't recommend heat rocks as those can malfunction and reach extreme temperatures.

The coolest area of the enclosure should be around 80°F during the day. At night, the whole enclosure can drop to 70°F safely.

What should you be feeding your dragon?

How old your bearded dragon changes both how often they eat and what exactly they should be eating but no matter what they should be offered the same types of things.

1. Gut loaded insects sprinkled with calcium supplements (As many as your beardie with eat in 5 minutes)
2. Fresh greens ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup for 4-12 month old and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup for adults)

Young dragons between 0-4 months of age should be fed insects twice a day and be offered greens daily; Their diet should be about 70% insects and 30% greens. 4-12 months of age should be fed insects once a day and be offered greens daily; Their diet should be about 50% insects and 50% greens. While adults should be offered insects twice a week and be fed greens daily; Their diet should consist of 20% insects and 80% greens.

Gut loading insects means you should be offering the insects a commercial diet that contains Vitamin A at least 24 hours prior to feeding your dragon. As well as sprinkling them in a calcium supplement that contains Vitamin D.

The types of insects you can feed matter in order to avoid obesity. Insects you can feed regularly are:

- Black soldier fly larvae
- Crickets
- Dubia roaches
- Hornworms
 - Be sure to get captive bred ones since wild one are actually toxic
- Silkworms

These insects can be feed as treats:

- Superworms
- Butterworms
- Waxworms

Always avoid feeding wild-caught bugs! These insects can be covered in insecticides or potentially be toxic.

You should offer a variation of greens to provide your bearded dragon with a balanced diet. Be careful to cut vegetables up into bite-sized pieces.

Here is a brief list of greens and vegetables that bearded dragon have with every meal:

- Cactus pad/prickly pear
- Collard greens
- Endive
- Mustard greens
- Spring mix

- Turnip greens
- Watercress

These greens can be given in moderations:

What health concerns should you look out for?

One major concern for bearded dragons is metabolic bone disease. Metabolic bone disease is caused by a lack of calcium, vitamin D3 and/or vitamin A in a bearded dragon diet. These are typically dragons that do not have a UVB lamp or if their UVB bulb hasn't been replaced every 6 months. Without the calcium and vitamin, their bones This leads to symptoms such as not eating, weakness, constipation, motor paralysis, muscular spasms, skeletal deformities and bone fractures.

Much like dogs and cats, bearded dragons can also get mites. They typically hide into the skin folds, external ears and vent of your dragon. If you look around these areas, you will see tiny red dots. You may also see your beardie scratching or rubbing themselves against items in their terrarium. These mites can also spread to other reptiles in your household leading to an entire mite infestation that, much like with fleas, can be hard to tackle. If you notice any of these symptoms, you should take your bearded dragon into a vet and get treatment for both your dragon and their environment.

Coccidiosis

All bearded dragons have salmonella and that means you can get salmonella from any bearded dragon (or any reptile) you handle. It is always important to wash your hands after handling your beardie, especially prior to eating, and to warn other people

Calcium is a major part of any beardie's life, this is especially true for female dragons. Regardless of if you are breeding or not, female dragons can start to develop eggs. If there isn't enough calcium in their diet then this can lead to retained eggs. Retained eggs can cause lethargy, inappetence, weakness and eventually death if left untreated. In some cases, spaying your bearded dragon may be the best option.

Mouth rot

What potential toxins do you need to look out for?

Bearded dragons are omnivores and have a more wide range of things they can eat. However, There are still a few toxics that your newly adopted dragon could get into:

- Avocado
- Onion
- Mushrooms

What is Brumation?

Brumation, similar to hibernation, is a period of time where bearded dragons slowly stop eating, become less social and begin to hide. This tends to happen in the fall or winter and can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. During this time, your beardie does not need to be fed, however you should continue to monitor their weight. During brumation, bearded dragons become very lethargic in order to save energy and maintain their weight as they sleep through the next few months. If you notice your dragon has lost more than 10% of its body weight then immediately contact the vet and schedule an appointment.

Do bearded dragons have teeth?

<https://reptifiles.com/bearded-dragon-care/>

<https://www.lizards101.com/bearded-dragon-diet-3-feeding-presentation-water-needs-factors/>

Husbandry, diseases and veterinary care of the bearded dragon