

Bearded Dragon

Care of Bearded Dragons

Jennifer Graham, DVM, Dipl. ABVP-Avian/ECM, Dipl. ACZM

Natural History The two most common pet bearded dragons are *Pogona vitticeps* and *P. barbata*. They are found in the rocky, semi-desert areas of Australia and Tasmania. Bearded dragons are ground dwellers but will climb rocks and low branches. They are active during daylight hours.

Special Characteristics

Longevity: In captivity, bearded dragons can live 7 to 10 years with proper care. They become sexually mature between 10 and 18 months.

Size: Adults will reach a total length of 15-20 inches.

Temperament: Bearded dragons make wonderful pets. They are generally very docile, and usually take well to handling. They are curious and attentive to their surroundings. Interesting behaviors include arm waving, head bobbing, and digging.

Captive Care Requirements

Lighting: Ultraviolet B is required to maintain bearded dragons. The best source of UVB is the sun, but a special fluorescent bulb can be purchased from a reptile shop. This bulb must be placed no more than 12 inches from the basking site and should be on a timer to provide about 14 hours of daylight and 10 hours of darkness. It must be replaced every 12 months, because even though visible light is emitted, the UVB fades. Light bulbs with a screw-in end (even those sold as "full spectrum" bulbs) provide heat, but not UVB. Mercury vapor bulbs (i.e., PowerSun) is an option for a basking light that also provides UVB.

Temperature: The daytime temperature of the tank should be between 80-85o F with a basking spot of 95o-115oF. A lamp that emits heat should be placed above one end of the tank, providing a temperature gradient with one side of the tank warmer than the other. Select the wattage of the bulb to provide the proper temperature within the tank. Under tank heaters are useful to gently raise the overall temperature of the tank but should be used with a thermostat or rheostat to accommodate changing ambient temperatures. At night the temperature should drop to 70-75o F. When room temperatures are below 70o F at night, use an under-tank heater or a ceramic heat emitter. Obviously, at least two thermometers must be in use to monitor these temperatures, and care must be taken to prevent burns to the lizard. Heating elements can be dangerous if not used properly, and a smoke alarm is recommended. An ideal way to measure heat is with a digital infrared thermometer.

Humidity: Good ventilation is essential, and the humidity should be moderate (40-60%)
A humidifier or fogger can help maintain humidity in dry environments.