

Care Booklet

A complete guide to rearing healthy
Horsfield and Mediterranean tortoises.
Booklet includes: Accommodation, Diet
and Hibernating techniques

By The Tortoise Shop
www.thetortoiseshop.com

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Accommodation

Indoor Housing

The tortoises available on our website are best suited to a tortoise table set-up. Tortoise tables allow excellent air flow and a low humidity level; which is ideal for Mediterranean, African and Russian tortoises.



The recommended layout of the tortoise table is to have the basking lamp at one end, creating a hotspot of around 30/35dc. This allows a temperature gradient and in turn allows the tortoise to regulate its body temperature. The background temperature should be 20/25dc; this can easily be achieved by a centrally heated room.

- *A UVB lamp should be attached as close to the basking lamp as possible.*
- *A water dish should be left in at all times and topped up daily.*
- *The size of the tortoises table will vary depending on the size of the tortoise;*
- *Under 5 years approx.: 30 x 18 x 6 inches*
- *Over 5 years approx.: 4ft x 2ft x 10 inches*

Once the tortoise has settled in, you can add hides and plants to the enclosure. Adding these items beforehand can make the settling in period stressful for your tortoise. Do not place plants or hides close to the basking lamp as the tortoise may climb and fall onto its back. If you find the tortoise tipped over, turn to the correct position and place in a warm bath to allow the tortoise to rehydrate itself.

Other Indoor Housing

(Not recommended for Mediterranean, African and Russian breeds)

Vivariums or “fish tanks” are best suited to the tropical breeds such as Redfoot / Yellowfoots. This type of housing provides high heat and humidity which is perfect for tropical breeds of tortoise. These tortoises must have the same temperature day and night.

Outdoor Housing

Before building an outdoor enclosure consider dividing your garden into sections and deciding what each section may offer.

It is imperative that the tortoise has adequate shade/shelter from the elements. The best place for the outdoor run/house is in an area with as much all day sun as possible, with well-drained soil. Tortoises love to dig and bury so a sand and soil mix is an excellent substrate. Hides, a water dish, and other features such as wooden bridges and edible plants such as dandelions can be added to the enclosure.

Tortoises do, however, have predators such as large birds, foxes and other pets. This means that no matter what style of outdoor accommodation you choose, you need to ensure that a wire mesh lid is fitted for the safety of your tortoise.



Tortoise Lighting

Basking

Tortoises are cold blooded reptiles so they must have access to heat. For the breeds we have available the optimum basking spot should be 30/35dc and the cool area should be around 20/25dc. This temperature gradient allows the tortoise to regulate its own body temperature. Ideally the basking lamps should be on for around 8-10 hours a day.



Always turn off all lighting over night!

UV

If the tortoise does not have access to natural sunlight (outdoor area) then we recommend a UV lamp as well as the basking lamp. UV is a necessity for any tortoise. There are three different types of UV lamps / bulbs:

1. *UV Compact (UV only – effective life 12 months)*
2. *Combination (UV and Basking – effective life 12 months)*
3. *Strip (UV only – effective life 3 months)*



We would recommend either the compact or the combination as they are the most efficient and best value for money.

UV lamps and bulbs allow the tortoise to make vitamin D3 which helps prevent the tortoise from getting Metabolic Bone Disease.

Bedding / Substrate

There are numerous substrates available that are suitable for tortoises. We have tried and tested all the bedding available on our website.

The following is a list of the beddings that we provide, all are totally organic, and are free from any chemicals or toxins making them safe for your tortoise:

- *Kritters Crumble is made from coconut husk (coir)*
- *Repti Turf is made from compressed grass pressed into pellets.*
- *Aspen is a natural, odourless, dust free and absorbent product.*
- *Hemp is also a natural, dust free and absorbent product.*

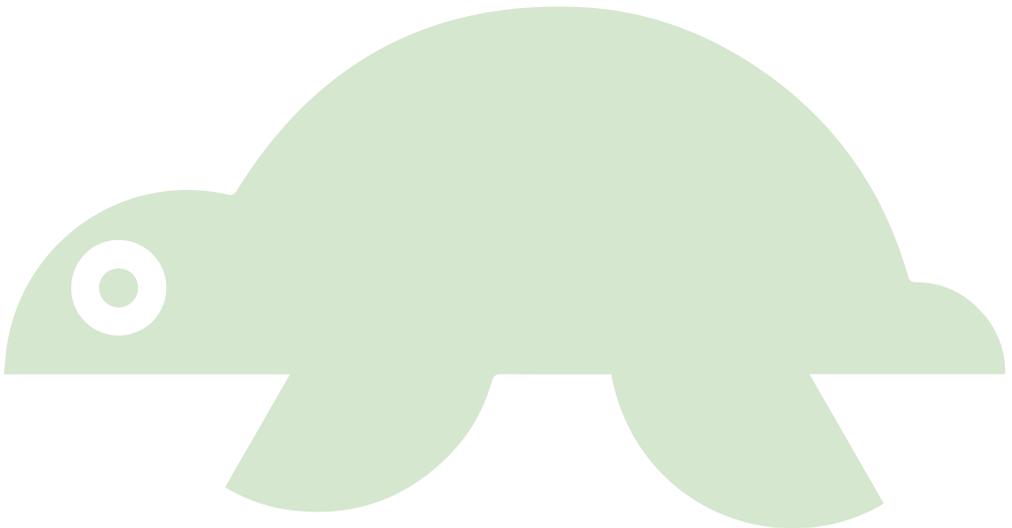
You can also use a standard sand and soil mix (50/50 play sand and top soil).

For a young tortoise the depth of the bedding should be around 2", but as the tortoise gets older you should increase the depth of the bedding to allow the tortoise to be able to dig and bury.



Water

Fresh water must always be available for your tortoise. There are beliefs that tortoises receive their water content from their food, this is not so, they require a water dish to drink from when they feel the need. Another way to ensure your tortoise is properly hydrated is to give the tortoise a shallow bath with warm water. Tortoises absorb a small amount of water via their tail whilst in the bath, so bathe your tortoise daily, especially during the summer months.



Diet

A growing tortoise needs the correct amount of food, water, calcium, UVB, vitamins and minerals in order to produce healthy bones. Calcium is a key ingredient for bone formation, UVB allows the tortoise to manufacture Vitamin D₃ naturally but in order for this to happen the tortoise needs calcium to complete the process. The best diet is a varied one, you should never offer the same type of food as the tortoise will be missing out on vitamins and minerals. The tortoise eats the same amount as the size of its body, and food should be offered 5 out of 7 days. A vitamin supplement such as Reptavite or Nutrobal can be sprinkled onto the tortoise's food a few times a week. If the tortoise is being housed in an enclosure that has natural vegetation then additional feeding should be rarely offered, and when it is, it should only be to add supplements.

Diet should be appropriate to the breed of the tortoise, as well as the size and the age. As a tortoise owner, you should aim for a slow growth.

For years, captive bred tortoises had almost always displayed thick, spongy bone formation or pyramid shaped scutes, thick dark keratin layers, spinal deformations and walking difficulties as a result of owners feeding up to two or three times the amount of food the tortoise required.

Tortoises are grazers; they thrive when they are allowed to feed naturally on wild growing weeds and flowers. They should be allowed controlled inactivity periods and discouraged from eating 365 days a year. Never offer food which contain high levels of protein (peas, beans, bananas) or have extremely negative calcium to phosphorous balance. Rarely (if ever) offer your tortoise any fruit as this can lead to flagellate proliferation and colic.

The following list contains wild plants, cultivated plants and salad items that can be used to form the basis of a good natural and balanced diet for your tortoise. When picking these plants ensure that you wash them thoroughly before feeding because doing so will dispose of any pollution (such as weed killers or fertilisers) and also any bird droppings (this is the main way in which worms are passed to your tortoise).

Feeding List

Dandelion, Trefoils, Honeysuckle, Cats ears, Vetches, Sow thistle, Hawk bits, Hawkweeds, Plantains, Clover, Pansies, Rose leaves and petals, Hibiscus, Mallows, Grape vine leaves, Agave plant, Mulberry leaves, Bindweeds, Opuntia cacti pads and fruit, Romaine or red leaf lettuce, Watercress, Escarole, Chicory, Rocket

The following food should only be given occasionally:

Cabbage, Beet greens, Kale, Alfalfa Hays, Finely chopped carrot



Hibernation

DO NOT HIBERNATE YOUR TORTOISE WITHIN THE FIRST 12 MONTHS OF OWNERSHIP REGARDLESS OF ITS AGE!



The breeds of tortoise that hibernate do so for health reasons. Irregular hibernation will adversely affect the tortoise’s health and life span.

Most Mediterranean breeds are biologically set to hibernate for a period of time; it is unnatural for tortoises to eat and be awake for 365 days a year.

You cannot trick Mother Nature without consequences; if your tortoise is awake every winter, the increased food intake can lead to abnormal growth and in turn cause Metabolic Bone Disease, lumpy shells and sometimes even kidney and bladder stones. The positives of hibernation far out way the negatives!



Common mistakes made include:

- *Feeding the tortoise prior to hibernation*
- *Incorrect hibernation temperature i.e. above 10dc or below 0*
- *No protection against predators (when hibernating outside)*
- *Hibernating an ill tortoise*

So that’s the negatives out of the way, let’s look at the right way to hibernate your tortoise.

Wind down process:

THE TORTOISE MUST HAVE AN EMPTY GUT BUT A FULL BLADDER!!

You need to completely starve the tortoise prior to the hibernation period. The starvation period should be;

7 days for tortoises up to 1 year old

10 – 14 days for tortoises aged between 2-4 years

21 – 28 days for tortoises older than 4 years

If your tortoise is kept outside don't worry as you will find that the tortoise will naturally start to eat less as the weather gets colder.

Whilst going through the starvation period the tortoise must have a full bladder. We recommend daily bathing throughout the wind down process; this will ensure that the tortoise is nicely hydrated.

When your tortoise has an empty gut and a full bladder you need to be sure that you hibernate the tortoise in the right location – where your tortoise isn't going to freeze but is also not going to wake up early due to warm weather.

The perfect temperature for hibernating is between 3 – 7dc constantly.

We strongly suggest the fridge method for hibernation. We find this to be the safest and most effective method available. A domestic fridge temperature is around 5dc and opening the door for a few seconds daily, will ensure adequate air supply.

Brick garages can also be used, but you must be on guard as you have less control over the outdoor temperatures.

Boxing up your tortoise

Place your tortoise in a tightly fitting box containing soil/compost and place this box into a larger box containing poly chippings – these are an excellent insulation buffer. Ensure that these boxes are not air tight, and that both have air holes. You can secure the lid with elastic bands.

Hibernation Time Scales

1 year = 3 weeks

2 years = 6 weeks

3 years = 10 weeks

4 years = 16 weeks

5 years and over = 22 weeks

When you hibernate for the first time we strongly suggest that you only hibernate for 3 weeks, regardless of the age of the tortoise.

Waking up time

Immediately after awakening you should let the tortoise acclimatize at room temperature for around half an hour. Whilst the tortoise acclimatizes, turn on the basking and UV lamps. We recommend that you bathe your tortoise for 10 minutes or so in warm water; this will allow your tortoise to rehydrate and flush out the toxins in the tortoise's body. After bathing, place your tortoise back into the tortoise table. On the days following awakening you should increase the room temperature and bathe daily. Feeding should commence within a day or two. If your tortoise hasn't eaten within five days of waking up after hibernation we suggest you give us a call or contact a vet for advice.



Important Information

Tortoise Tables;

- are for indoor use only; do not place outside or in moist/damp conditions
- are designed for Mediterranean, African and Russian tortoises
- should be placed on a stable flat surface to ensure they cannot be pulled or tipped over
- should not be exposed to room temperatures over 25dc
- are not toys. Keep out of reach of children, unless under adult supervision. Keep out of reach of all other pets and animals

Basking/UV Lamps should;

- ever be left on for more than 10 hours a day
- never be left on overnight
- be an adequate distance (height) above the bedding
- always be switched off and allowed to cool before handling
- not be used if you notice any damage to the mains cable, plug, bulb or the lamp holder
- never be directed/angled to a position where the lamp is within 20cm of the walls of the tortoise table

Do;

- Use water or a mild detergent to clean out the tortoise table. Never use flammable, corrosive or abrasive cleaning products
- Use a 3amp fuse if you ever need to replace the fuse in the plug. Consult a qualified electrician for advice is necessary
- Replace UV bulbs with like for like specifications
- Remove damp bedding and replace with new bedding

Important Information

Don't;

- Place the water bowl directly under the lamp
- Place any objects or materials which are flammable or likely to melt in the tortoise table
- Install any misters / foggers or any products likely to cause humidity, damp or condensation within the tortoise table
- Use hay or straw as a substrate



Q: *When can my tortoise go outside?*

A: The basic rule of thumb is T-shirt weather is tortoise weather.

Q: *How deep should the tortoise's bath be?*

A: The water should just touch the bottom of the tortoise's chin.

Q: *When is the time to hibernate?*

A: The best month(s) tend to be the coldest, darkest months e.g.:
December, January or February.

Q: *Should my tortoise have a licence?*

A: Only if the breed requires one. Hermann's do, but Horsfield's don't.

Q: *What should I do, I have just received my tortoise and he's cold?*

A: Yes tortoises are cold blooded reptiles; he will become cold if he has no access to bask. The tortoise will soon warm up when he basks in his new enclosure. Also give your tortoise a nice warm bath.

Q: *I have seen some pellet food in a pet shop is it ok to feed it to my tortoise?*

A: No, in our experience these pellets are very high in protein and extremely addictive.

Q: *How often should my tortoise go to toilet?*

A: A normal tortoise fed on a varied natural diet should go to the toilet every few days.

Q: *My tortoise has done a White poo, what is this?*

A: This is normal, tortoises have 3 bodily functions, they wee, poo and expel uric acid (that's the white stuff). If the uric acid is very grainy like sand it's a sign that the tortoise is de-hydrating so increase the baths. If the uric acid has a yoghurt texture then this is a sign of a nicely hydrated tortoise.

Q: *When should I change the bedding?*

A: A full change needs to be done every month, but do take out any poo, or damp bedding on a daily basis. We have tested all the bedding that's available on our site ourselves on our own tortoises so if in doubt give us a call.

Q: *My tortoise isn't very active, is this normal?*

A: Always allow a period of time for the tortoise to settle in, we recommend 6 weeks. Tortoises can get stressed when moving home so keep this in mind. Tortoises can sleep an awful lot and again this is normal, make sure that the tortoise is coming out to eat and bask. If the tortoise is not coming out to eat then check your temperatures as tortoises can sulk if they are not warm enough!

Q: *Should I register my tortoise with a vet?*

A: The choice is yours; just make sure the vet is 100% competent with tortoises.

Q: *How do I know if my tortoise is ill?*

A: Normally the first thing to be affected is the tortoise's loss of appetite. The most common signs to watch out for are sticky eyes, runny noses, gaping or squeaking when breathing. Should your tortoise show any of these signs consult a reptile vet immediately.

Q: *Does my tortoise need any routine treatments?*

A: The only treatment that your tortoise should need is worming. This can now be done at home which is less stressful for you and the tortoise. The worming solution can be found on our website.

Tortoise Species Recognition

Hermann Tortoise



Horsfield Tortoise



Margined Tortoise



Sulcata Tortoise



Leopard Tortoise



Spur-Thigh Tortoise



About The Tortoise Shop

Only tortoise perfection will suffice

The Tortoise Shop has meticulously cared for, and maintained, several colonies of differing species of tortoise within the U.K. careful expansion and prudent investment over the years has enabled The Tortoise Shop to grow into the UK's market leader in tortoise breeding, retailing, product design and in-house manufacturing. The Tortoise shop prides itself in operating a very personal and friendly service – putting customers and their tortoises first!



Our Online Shop – www.thetortoiseshop.com

Contact Us

Here to help, Contact us on:

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