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BEARDED DRAGON CARE

There are many species of Bearded Dragons native to Australia. The main species kept in captivity include the **Eastern Bearded Dragon** *Pogona barbata*, **Central Bearded Dragon** *Pogona vitticeps* and **Pygmy Bearded Dragon** *Pogona henrylawsoni*. Their gentle nature & somewhat curious behaviours can make them interesting pets. Some Dragons will grow to around 50-60cm in length (including tail) & live to around 12-15 years. Below is an outline of the 'basic' requirements for keeping Dragons as pets.

Please note: All Australian Dragon lizards are protected species in Australia. Seek individual state & territory requirements for legalities on keeping Dragons as pets.

Housing

- Bearded Dragons **can be housed indoors**. They require suitable artificial heat & light sources as outlined below
- **Suitable enclosures** include plastic tubs or clear plastic-fronted cabinets at least 1m long x 0.5m wide
- Enclosure set-up depends on the size/age of the Dragon. Provide '**hide**' **boxes & branches** to climb & 'bask' on
- **Substrates** (enclosure floor covering) are most simply & hygienically provided by means of newspaper or recycled paper kitty litter.
- **Disinfect cages** each week (use bleach diluted 1:10 with water. Rinse well afterwards). 'Spot' clean as necessary
- Dragons are territorial. Adult males will often fight if housed together
- A **shallow water bowl** can be offered. Ensure the Dragon can't drown in it. For juveniles it is necessary to spray them daily with water for them to drink. Avoid large water bowls, many Dragon species come from dry areas & prefer lower humidity
- **Heating:** Provide them with a 'temperature gradient' in their enclosure. This means they need a 'hot' end & a 'cool' end. Temperatures must be monitored with thermometers at both of these ends. Ensure there is adequate ventilation
- The **hot/basking area** end should be heated with a thermostatically controlled ceramic or reflector globe to create a basking temperature of 35-40C. The cool end should be around 25-28C
- Overnight temperatures should not fall below 21C. The use of heat mats or weaker ceramic heat lamps may be required to achieve this. Do not use heat rocks, as serious burns to the Dragon could result.
- **Lighting:** Dragons have strict requirements with respect to **UVB light** supplementation
- Correct lighting may also stimulate natural foraging and feeding behaviours in some species
- Dragons rely on UVB light rays to be able to adequately produce **Vitamin D3** in their skin. Vitamin D3 is essential for proper calcium metabolism in Dragons
- UVB light can be provided by artificial 'UV-lights', however there is **NO substitute for natural unfiltered sunlight**
- Dragons should be placed in **sunlight for 20-30 minute** periods at least 2-3 times a week. When doing this ensure the Dragon is enclosed safely in an **escape proof/predator proof cage**. The sunlight should not pass through any glass or plastic as these will filter out UVB rays. Make certain the Dragon has **access to shade & cannot overheat**
- Most artificial UV sources designed for reptiles need to be placed at a minimum length from the reptile obtaining the light. Furthermore, the effective UVB emission lifespan of these lights is usually in the vicinity of 3-6 months, so they will need to be **replaced at least every 6 months**
- Recommended day and night cycles for most of the temperate Dragon species is **12 hrs light and 12 hrs dark**

Handling

- Most Dragons can become very used to being handled. Over handling though may be stressful
- Support the whole body of the Dragon from underneath. Particularly the fore & hind limbs. Avoid squeezing them

Feeding

- Dragons are **omnivorous**. They gradually become more herbivorous (eating >75% vegetable matter) as they age.
- Feed them a variety of insects (crickets, roaches, moths, beetles etc) & greens with small amounts of fruits.
- Insects should be **gut-loaded** (fed) & then dusted with Calcium/vitamin/mineral powder just before being offered
- **Salad greens/vegies** offered can include Asian greens, endive, dandelions, mustard greens, sweet potato, squash, carrots, beans & peas. Occasional fruits such as apple, pear & melons can be offered
- Juveniles should be fed 2-3 times a day with small crickets/roaches/salad (pieces NO bigger than 1/3 the width of their heads & as much as they can eat in 5-10minutes). **Feed adults every 2-3 days**

Veterinary & Health Notes

- Have any new Dragon examined by a reptile vet. Parasite checks and general blood screens can be performed
- It is essential that you **quarantine any newly acquired Dragon**. Don't risk introducing disease or parasites. Speak to your reptile vet for details on sound quarantine procedures
- It is recommended that you have your Dragons **vet-checked annually**. Especially if you intend to breed them
- Always **wash your hands** after handling any reptile & between handling of different reptiles
- It is a good idea to **regularly weigh** & record the body weight of your Dragons
- Dragons can be transported individually in tied cotton bags. Ensure that they can't escape or overheat.