

Bearded Dragon Care Sheet

The Bearded Dragon (also known as Beardies and BD's) originate from Australia. An adult averages 16-24 inches from nose to tail and will average a 10 year life span. (Although 15 years has occasionally been heard of.) The Bearded Dragon is an increasingly popular pet in the reptile world, with bags of character, very tame from young and great with children and adults alike. Although the initial set-up for your new found pet can be rather pricey, once laid out you will only have to change the UV tube and heat bulb roughly every 6-12 months. You will also find they become cheaper to feed as they get older as they move from a diet of mostly live food to a diet of mostly veg.

Choosing your Bearded Dragon

Personally when choosing your Bearded Dragon I would go for a younger one. The joy of having something so tiny (around 4-8inches) then watching them grow and become attached to you is so rewarding. Although getting an adult is fine, understandably you do not know their history (ie how often have they been handled? What food were they given and how often? etc) Please remember, if a breeder or shop are selling them less than 6/8 weeks old, you should try and avoid them. The mortality rate before this can be high, and it just isn't worth the risk of moving such a young animal. Please also take into account if choosing more than one that you have adequate space for a second vivarium, if you are fortunate and they are both female, they may be able to remain together all their lives, but 2 males will fight to the death. If they turn out to be of opposite sexes you will also need to split them for a while, as males become sexually mature at 8/12months, whereas females will not be ready until 15/18months old and at least 450grams in weight. Leaving a male BD in with a female can have drastic results, such as egg bound and nasty wounds caused by the over excited male on such a young girl. The other problem also being that they are most likely clutch mates, and the breeding of brother and sister could cause all sorts of genetic problems in the offspring. So buying two is not recommended from the same Clutch.

Adult Bearded Dragons are naturally solitary animals in the wild and would only meet for mating purposes, so you do not have to worry about your new pet becoming lonely without a mate, and is more likely to cause them to become stressed but Most females will live happy together.

Housing and Lighting

The minimum size cage for adult dragons should be 4x2x2 foot vivarium. Try to avoid all glass enclosures as these can be a nightmare to heat to the required temperatures. Wooden vivariums with glass fronts are the more popular choice as they hold the heat well, but have a lovely viewing area in front. You will need a UV tube of either the 12% variety, which runs the length of your vivarium. Although please note that if your vivarium is 4 foot. You will a 30or 36 inch tube. You will also need a 'starter' unit for the UV tube appropriate for the size and wattage of you tube. (All good pet shops will have these in stock) If you do not supply the correct amount of UV light at the

correct percentage your dragon could become seriously ill, even getting MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease) a disorder that prevents bones from growing and developing properly and is irreversible once set-in. You should keep your UV tube on for 12 hours a day. Some breeders and hobbyists adjust this according to the season (12 hours Spring and Autumn, 14 hours Summer and 10 hours Winter) but this is only really necessary if you plan on breeding, or want your pet to brumate (a semi state of hibernation) for the winter months. You should also purchase a 'reflector' the same length of your UV tube. This is basically a long reflective strip placed above the UV tube, making sure that all the UVB rays are directed straight into the vivarium and not everywhere. In doing your research before thinking of purchasing a Bearded Dragon you may read and/or hear mentions of UV tubes with additional D3. As long as you're providing your BD with enough calcium and the correct percentage UV lighting then their bodies will naturally produce its own D3.

Heating

Heating **MUST** be supplied for your beardie. Remember they are from a much warmer climate than here in the UK! Heating should be provided from above via a heat-bulb, and not from below with heat mats. If you watch Bearded Dragons in their natural environment they are out during the day basking on rocks absorbing the sun's heat and not burrowed away in caves absorbing the warmth through their bellies (such like the popular Leopard Gecko) Bearded Dragons need to bask in high temperatures in order to digest their food properly. We use red basking bulbs in the vivarium for them to bask. Normal household bulbs should also be avoided. They do not have the power to get the correct temperatures; although in emergencies when a heat bulb has blown household bulbs can be used to keep your BD warm, but will not reach the desired temperatures correctly. They should not be left like this for more than 24 hours, and it is good practice to keep a spare heat bulb just in case. Low energy bulbs should also be avoided as they contain mercury, and if the bulb was to blow this could be potentially life threatening for your beardie. Depending on the size of the enclosure then the wattage of the bulb will vary, but as long as the heat bulb is plugged into a good thermostat then there is no need to worry about the wattage being too high. Certain makes also contain additional UVB and UVA rays, but these bulbs are more expensive, and only really needed if you are having troubles establishing a breeding group. Heating should be kept on for the same amount of time as the UV lights. The temperature directly beneath the 'basking spot' should reach between 100-110F with the rest of the hot-end being around 95-100F. The far end or 'cold side' of the viv should be around 75-80F to give your beardie a chance to cool down if they choose. The easiest way to achieve this (and in many keepers opinions a **MUST**) in your set-up is to use a dimming thermostat with probe. There are many products on the market, the most popular being the 'Habistat' High range dimmer to achieve the required temperatures in your set-up. One way is to place the probe through the back of the viv and place near to the red bulb then move the probe a little bit away from the basking spot. You may need to do this a few times to get the right temperature. Night Temp to between 75-80F as this is the cool temperature required. You will need to have an additional thermometer to

check that the temperature in the hot end is correct.
DO NOT place the vivarium directly in front of a window, as the unfiltered sunlight being projected through the glass will raise the temperatures significantly and could be fatal.

Décor

So what should you use to decorate your vivarium? For starters you will need something to place underneath your 'basking spot' Most commonly used are nice sized rocks, as they hold the heat well, but try and avoid rocks that conduct a lot of heat (such as chalk and limestone) as the heat will build up, increasing the chance of burning the underside of your Bearded Dragon. 'Hot Rocks' available from some pet shops should be avoided for this same reason. Bearded Dragons are also very good climbers, so some nice sticks, bark and vine is a nice touch. The other benefit of having such items in with your Bearded Dragon is that they will be able to get closer to their UV therefore reducing the risks of MBD, and also making the production of D3 more efficient. Be careful not to get it too close to the heat-bulb though, as they have a tendency to jump, and you don't want to risk your beardie getting burnt, this is especially so in the younger dragons who you'll often observe jumping from place to place.

Fake leaves, plants, cacti etc are also available on the market. They can make the vivarium look good and is another added stimulant for your dragon, as they can climb these, but be careful as they will often mistake these items for food and try to eat these. If you notice your dragon doing this then remove the item immediately as their stomachs will not be able to digest the plastic leaves.

Substrate

So what should you keep on the base of your vivarium? It is agreed that young dragons should not be kept on loose substrates, as they are not as experienced as the older dragons and often miss their prey, gulping up a mouthful of loose substrate which can get stuck in their stomach and they may not be able to pass this, eventually being fatal and may even cause death! Wood shavings, Original lizard litter, coconut fibres and walnut shell should be avoided. If a piece was accidentally indigested the acids in the stomach cannot break it down, the piece will stay whole in the stomach, not being able to pass the other side.

Desert sand should not be used with younger dragons. It is OK for adults to be put on, Natural sands (such as exo-terra desert sand) are a much safer choice for your Bearded Dragons although again this should not be used with the young Dragons.

Other popular choices to use include tiles, lino and reptile carpet. There are lots of colours you can choose from, and as it is not a loose substrate is much safer for your Bearded Dragon. They are very easy to clean and also help to

keep otherwise sharp claws nice and trim. Samples can often be picked up from DIY shops, as well as packs from pound saving shops.

With young Bearded Dragons many people use paper towels, newspaper or blank paper on the base of their vivariums. It can be changed quickly, you can keep a better idea of how often your dragon 'passes' and although not the prettiest of choices it is cost effective.

Feeding

Bearded Dragons are omnivores meaning they like fruit and vegetables as well as meat (in the way of live food). Younger beardies need more live food than veg as they need the extra protein for their growth, whereas adults need more veg and less live foods for the vitamins. Below you will find a rough break down of how often and what you can feed your dragon.

Live food

There are many prey items you can use as a staple live food for your beardie, these include locusts, crickets, roaches, Buffalo worms, silkworms, butterworms, and Fruit Grubs.

Baby Dragons Foods

Locust, crickets, silkworms, buffalo worms, and roaches. Prey offered should be of an appropriate size and no bigger than the size of your beardies head. Any uneaten prey should be removed from the enclosure after 10 minutes to avoid stress. It has also been noted that crickets that have been left in a vivarium overnight will often 'nibble' on your sleeping dragon, causing sores and stress to your lizard. Don't worry about overfeeding younger dragons too much as all that energy will be put into growing. However if you feel they are looking over weight (ie they cannot hold up their bellies and they have huge fatty stores in their cheeks) then lessen the amount of food you are supplying them each feed. (We Do Not Feed any Mealworm to how Dragons)

Wax worms are a fatty treat for your beardie, and also very addictive, so should not be offered too often. These are practically good for female dragons that are breeding, to help put on extra weight.

Gut loading

You should always gut load your live food before offering them to your beardie, otherwise you are basically feeding them an empty shell. You can either buy 'gut load' from a pet shop and place this in with the prey, or dust some veg with vitamins and place this in with the prey. Leave for between 12-24 hours, to make sure all the prey have eaten some of the veg. By feeding the 'food' you also increase how long they live for, saving you money in the long

run. Locusts have a much longer gut track than crickets, so will stay healthier longer.

Dusting

This is a **MUST!** They will not get all their calcium with d3 and vitamins from their veg and live food alone, and although the UV tubes help they still need additional supplements. Food should be dusted daily. 5 days a week with a multi vitamin (nutrobal and repton are popular choices) and 2 days with **PURE** calcium. With babies, dust their live food and veg as they do not readily take fruit and veg. With adults also dust live food on the days offered and the veg the other days.

Fruit and vegetables known to be good for bearded dragons (remember variety is the key);

Apple, apricot, asparagus, bell pepper (red green or yellow), blackberries, blueberries, bok choy, cabbage, cactus leaves, cactus pear, celery (stalk and leaves), cherries, chicory, clover, collard greens, cranberries, Spring Greens, dandelion leaves, endive, escarole, figs, grapes, grapefruit, kale, leeks, lemon grass, honey dew melon, mango, mustard greens, okra, papaya, parsnips, fresh peas, peaches, pears, pineapple, plums, prunes, pumpkin, radish, raisins, rosemary, seaweed (kelp), spearmint. Squash, strawberries, turnips, turnip greens, watercress, watermelon, zucchini.

Fruit and Vegetables that should only be given to your dragon on occasions as at treat;

Banana (with skin), beans (green, canned, kidney, pinto etc), beetroot, broccoli, carrot, cauliflower, hardboiled egg, kiwi, olives (de-stoned), orange, parsley, peas (defrosted, cooked), pomegranate, sweet corn, sweet potato, raspberries.

Food items that should never be given to your bearded dragon include;

Avocado, Beef, Bread, Wheat, Chicken, Chives, Eggplant, Garlic, Lettuce (iceburg, loose leaf), Mushrooms, Onion, Pork, Rhubarb, Fish, Spaghetti, Spinach, Cheese, Yoghurt,

How Often Should I feed my Bearded Dragon?

A lot of people struggle with this one! Baby bearded dragons need the protein found in crickets and locusts and do not need as much veg, whereas adults need veg more and less live foods. Below is a rough guide to how often you should feed your Bearded Dragon;

0-3 Months - Live foods should be offered 7 days a week and veg 7 times a week.

3-6 Months - Live foods should be offered 7 days a week and veg 7 times a week.

6-8 Months - Live food should be offered 7 days a week and veg 7 times a week.

8-12 months - Live foods should be offered 6 days a week and veg 7 times a week.

12-18 months - Live food should be offered 6 days a week and veg 7 times a

week.

We offer live food every day but the above is the average guide.

Fresh Water Every Day.