



# Paws, Claws & Wings

*Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals*



## Bearded Dragon Husbandry

Bearded Dragons (beardies) are rapidly growing in popularity as pets. These beautiful reptiles have specific housing and dietary requirements. If these requirements are not met, serious health problems may follow.



## Enclosure

The cage needs to be at least 122cm x 33cm to house one adult beardie, hides, sun and shade and climbing areas need to be supplied.

They originate from the deserts of Australia so their temperature and lighting requirements are very important. They, like all reptiles, need a heating gradient in their tanks. The temperature in the hot side of the tank needs to be 34 degrees Celsius at the basking site, and the temperature in the cool side of the tank needs to be 21 degrees Celsius. The beardie needs to be able to move from the warm side to the cool side of the tank in order to regulate its own body temperature and metabolism. The heating can be provided either by an under substrate heating pad, an infrared bulb or a ceramic heating bulb, or all three if your tank is that large.

Even though beardies are desert animals they do enjoy soaking themselves occasionally so ensure you provide a water bowl large enough for your beardie to fit into and deep enough for the water to reach midway up the body.

Lighting is also extremely important for a beardies health. If they do not have access to at least 2 hours of direct sunlight a day, they must have a UV Bulb in their tank.

They NEED UVB or they cannot absorb calcium. A full spectrum UV bulb needs to be fitted into the tank at a height no higher than 15cm from the body when the beardie is basking. These bulbs need to be replaced every 3 to 18 months depending on the product as they only put out optimal UV for a period of time. The sun is by far the better and cheaper source of UV rays. If a glass tank is used, remember UV rays cannot pass through glass, and glass tanks heat up very fast and to very high temperatures. Do not leave any animal in a glass tank in the sun or they will become much too hot and may die from heatstroke. Good substrates to use in the enclosure are a bare floor, newspaper, towels, rabbit pellets, and astro-turf. Do not keep a beardie on sand or gravel as it may be eaten causing a gravel impaction, which may need to be surgically corrected.

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## Food

As previously mentioned, nutrition is extremely important to a Bearded Dragon's health.

They need to be fed once daily and have access to fresh, clean water at all times.

These reptiles are omnivorous, the babies eat nearly all protein and as they grow up, they start to eat more greens until at adulthood; proteins may be used only as a treat.

Some examples of suitable proteins are: crickets, mealworms, giant mealworms,

Madagascar hissing cockroaches, smaller lizards, and mice. All prey items must themselves be fed correctly to ensure the beardie receives the correct nutrition from them. Never feed wild caught prey as the animal may contain pesticides. Do not leave live prey in cage over night as the prey may try to eat the beardie. Prey must be no longer than the width of the beardies head.

Some examples of suitable greens are: lucerne, rose petals, hibiscus flowers and leaves, wandering jew, nasturtium, romaine lettuce, dandelion, collard, mustard, kale, figs, kiwi fruit, apples, berries, peas, banana, beans, carrots, marrows, cucumber, corn, sweet potato, yam, squash, rocket, coriander. The greens, fruit and vegetables must be finely chopped and the fruit and vegetables only fed in moderation. Feed only small amounts of: spinach, rhubarb, cabbage, potatoes, beets, kale, turnip, soybeans as large amounts of these foods can be toxic.

Commercial Bearded Dragon pellets can also be fed but must not be the only food offered.

Never feed: fireflies, spiders, avocado, alcohol, caffeine, iceberg lettuce, chocolate.



If these guidelines are adhered to you will find that Bearded Dragons make wonderful pets. They are ideal for someone who is just starting to keep lizards as they can be handled and do not stress as much as any other lizard, they also require less specialization than other lizards. These animals are amusing, intelligent and can become quite cuddly with the owner. All in all beardies are amazing animals who if cared for correctly, will offer the owner many years of pleasure.



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