

Bearded dragons are native to inland Australia, where they have adapted well to life in a warm, dry environment. Free-ranging bearded dragons are omnivorous, consuming a variety of animal and plant items. The most common dragon is the inland bearded dragon, Pogona vitticeps. These fascinating reptiles are fast becoming the most popular lizard in the pet industry because of their ease of maintenance, placid disposition, friendly personality, hardiness, and fierce appearance. Bearded dragons maintain a moderate size and enjoy life in captivity as a family pet. Bearded dragons offered for sale are the result of multi-generational breeding in captivity. Several color and pattern varieties are available. Following purchase, a dragon should be taken to an exotic animal veterinarian for a general health check and a fecal exam for parasites.

Zoological Education Network provides educational materials about exotic companion animals.

Most Common Disorders of Bearded Dragons

Intestinal parasites

Appetite loss due to:
Improper husbandry, light cycle
Too cold temperatures
Endoparasites

Gastroenteritis from bacteria, viruses and parasites

Hypocalcemia and associated bone/muscle disorders from deficiency of calcium and/or vitamin D₃

Trauma:
Burns from cage heating devices and bulbs
Fractures (due in part to malnutrition)
Wounds inflicted by other animals

Dystocia, egg-binding

Bearded dragons can flourish as long-lived pets when attention is given to certain aspects of husbandry, including temperature, diet and exposure to ultraviolet-B light. Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your bearded dragon. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting www.ARAV.org and click on "Member Directory."

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BEARDED DRAGONS



Companion Reptile Care
S E R I E S

What to Expect from Your Bearded Dragon

Bearded dragons are suitable pets for children because these lizards rarely bite, scratch or whip with their tails. They genuinely respond to gentle handling and will look you in the eye, eat from your hand and rest in your lap. A dragon should not be caught or lifted by its tail; its body should be fully supported when it is being held or carried.

Is Your Bearded Dragon a Male or a Female?

It is important to know the gender of your pet in order to watch for and prevent potential problems with egg-laying in the female. A mature female bearded dragon should be examined by an exotic animal veterinarian at least yearly.

In the juvenile stage, there is little difference between male and female bearded dragons. As they approach adult size, the male begins to develop a broader head, and its large black “beard” becomes apparent in the breeding season. Males also have a thicker tail, enlarged femoral pores along their inner thighs, and a wider cloacal opening. Behavioral differences may be observed, but these are not always conclusive for sexing bearded dragons.

What Should You Feed Your Bearded Dragon?

In captivity, both live prey and salads should be offered to provide a balanced diet for your dragon. Because dragons are active during the day, they should be fed in the morning.

- The dragon’s live prey may consist of appropriately sized crickets, superworms (*Zophobas*), mealworms, wax worms, locusts and pinkie mice. The prey should be fed balanced diets, including fresh greens, for several days before feeding out. Prey should be “dusted” with a vitamin-mineral supplement and

calcium. Prey are dusted daily for baby bearded dragons. The frequency of dusting diminishes until adulthood, when prey are supplemented about once every 7-10 days.

- Salads may consist of chopped mixes of a variety of greens, such as romaine, dandelion, turnip greens, mustard greens, beet greens, kale, collards, bok choy, Swiss chard, escarole, spinach and cilantro.
- Vegetables may comprise up to 20% of the diet and can include squash, zucchini, sweet potato, broccoli, peas, beans, okra and grated carrot. Fruits may make up about 2-5% of the diet and may include papaya, melon and banana.
- Treats may consist of flower blossoms and infrequent small amounts of dog food. Commercial pellets are marketed for bearded dragons, but they haven’t been tested long-term.
- Sunshine Factor* may be beneficial to dragons.

FEEDING SCHEDULE AND CONTENT:

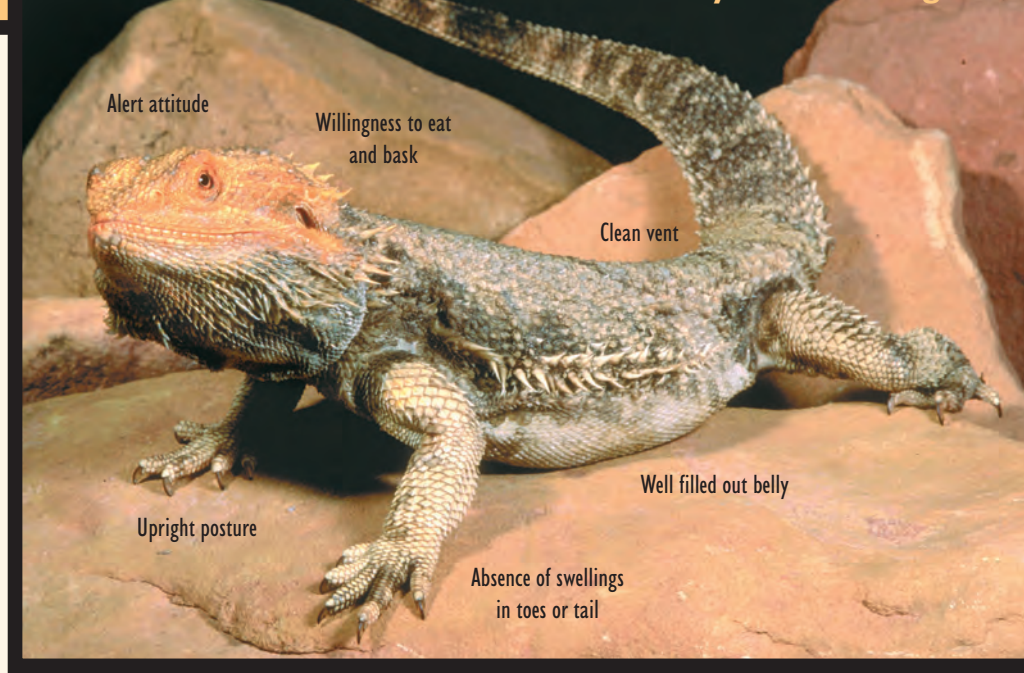
- Baby bearded dragons are fed twice daily and eat only small moving prey, such as 2-week-old crickets. As a general rule, dragons are fed crickets with a body length no greater than the width of the dragon’s head. Salads should be introduced at this early age so the dragons are accustomed to eating greens and vegetables as they mature. As the dragon grows, the size of live prey increases and intake of salads increases.
- Juvenile bearded dragons are growing rapidly and need plenty of food offered daily. Hungry juveniles housed together will nip the toes and tail-tips of their cagemates.
- Adult bearded dragons may be fed daily or every second day and prefer a diet of about 55% salad, 20% vegetables and 25% prey.

WATER:

- Bearded dragons thrive in low humidity. Drinking water should be provided in a shallow bowl or saucer. Dragons will often soak in their water bowl and may defecate in their water. Drinking and soaking bowls should be cleaned at least daily.

*www.HarrisonsPetProducts.com

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Bearded Dragon



How to Keep Your Bearded Dragon Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Quarantine new dragons in a separate area of the house for 3-6 months.

- ✓ Dragons housed together should be of similar size, with plenty of space available.

- ✓ Monitor body conditions of multiple dragons housed together for signs of stress in subordinate ones.

- ✓ Ensure a gradient of temperatures in their enclosure, from 70°F (20°C) to a hot basking spot of around 95°F (35°C).

- ✓ Expose to unfiltered sunlight or commercial full-spectrum fluorescent bulbs.

- ✓ Allow time outdoors when the temperature is above 70°F (20°C) (only in screen enclosure with access to shade and water).

- ✓ Consult with your exotic animal veterinarian about supplementation of calcium and vitamin D₃.

Housing for your bearded dragon should:

- ✓ be spacious and easy to clean, with smooth sides to prevent rostral abrasions

- ✓ be the size of a 10-gallon tank for a baby dragon; adults need large enclosures of 4 x 2 feet (1 x 0.6 m)

- ✓ be large enough for climbing, exploration, basking

- ✓ contain thick climbing branches or rocks to support heavy-bodied dragons

- ✓ include a large, shallow water tray for soaking

- ✓ have access of food and water containers for frequent cleaning

- ✓ include acceptable substrates: newspaper, alfalfa pellets, cypress mulch, organic (recycled) cellulose fiber

- ✓ provide a hiding area, such as a cardboard box or plant pot

It is important for bearded dragons to avoid:

- ✗ sand, gravel, corn cob, walnut shell, kitty litter and wood shavings as substrates

- ✗ potentially toxic live plants

- ✗ free roam of the house (to prevent chilling, trauma, ingestion of foreign materials and escape)

- ✗ shared housing between adults and hatchlings, as adults may eat hatchlings

- ✗ shared housing between any two or more dragons of different sizes

- ✗ potential for direct contact with heating elements

- ✗ over-supplementation of vitamins or minerals

- ✗ being fed lightning bugs