

BEARDED DRAGON CARESHEET

Enclosures:

When deciding on an enclosure for baby bearded dragons, the thing to remember is smaller is better. Go no smaller than a 10 gallon aquarium and no larger than a 20 gallon. Babies need to be able to hunt their food, and the bigger the cage the harder it is for them to find it, not to mention all that space is a little bit overwhelming. When purchasing enclosures for adults however, the opposite applies, the bigger the better. The absolute smallest size enclosure for an adult is a 40 gallon. If housing a pair together, the enclosure should be no smaller than 24" x 48" of floor space. The more dragons, the more space is needed and the bigger the enclosure should be.

Now, when housing dragons together there are a few things to remember. First, unless you want babies, house males and females separately. It's only natural, and it will happen. If your goal is to breed, still keep the two in separate tanks because the male will continuously try to breed the female and cause her undue stress. Second, never house males together. It causes too much stress to be put on them. Males are naturally territorial and very competitive, so you'll likely end up with dragons having various injuries and possibly death. If breeding however, it's a great idea to place the males, in separate tanks, within sight distance of each other. This tends to get them going and ready for the ladies. Females are perfect to house together, so long as they are about an inch and a half or so similar in size. Bearded Dragons are wonderful pets to watch and when you house 2 or more specimens together you get to witness their natural behaviors of arm waving and head bobbing, which are forms of communication. Just remember, the more dragons in a cage, the bigger the cage needs to be. When housing hatchlings together, males and females alike can be housed together. When they are that young, be sure to keep an eye on size and temperament. Watch out for those babies that tend to grow the fastest. These babies are generally more aggressive and will be the ones to eat first and the most, causing more submissive dragons to lose a meal. Over time this can be quite dangerous to the submissive dragons and cause them to grow more slowly or become afraid to eat. The more aggressive baby will be more likely to nip the toes and/or tail of the more submissive one, and also eat most of the food, causing the smaller ones to be stressed out. At this point, it's best to separate the babies by size and temperament. All babies must be kept within the same size range to ensure that no one is feeling stressed out and as they grow, continue to be split up in to the appropriate baby bins.

Substrate:

Good substrates to use for Bearded Dragons are paper towels, newspaper, non stick shelf liner, slate or unglazed ceramic tile, and washed play sand, which you can find at your local hardware store for approximately \$3 for a 50 pound bag, that has been sifted to remove the larger pebbles. I use the play sand myself and have had no problems with impaction or anything of the sorts. It's easy to sift through, visually appealing, the dragons love it because it provides a more natural feel than the newspaper or paper towels, it is very inexpensive and therefore able to be changed more often, keeping the dragons homes cleaner. Play Sand should be changed approximately every 2 to 3 months. Paper towels and Newspaper are also very

good to use because they are really easy to clean and you always start over with fresh paper each time they make a mess.

Bad substrates to use are as follows: Walnut Shells, Lizard Litter, Wood Chips/Shavings, Gravel, Marbles, and Calci-Sand. Using Calci-Sand (or Calcium Sand) is never a good idea, because it's easy to overdose your lizard on calcium. Every time a dragon eats, it eats the sand, well, it's getting calcium every time it eats sand. It also gets calcium every time it eats the crickets, worms, or veggies/greens. The more efficient way to tell monitor your dragons calcium is to dish it out yourself. Don't rely on the sand to do it for you because there is no way to tell if it is getting too much or not enough. The problem with the other substrates is impaction. If a dragon eats something that is too big for it (ex. a dragon should never eat anything bigger than the space between it's eyes) there is a risk of severe nerve damage leading to paralysis and death. You have to be the one to monitor the sizes of the food your dragon eats, the dragon will try to eat anything, and probably would succeed, but at great risk to it's health. Another substrate that is not a good idea to use is rabbit pellets, as. these have a risk of impaction, as well as growing mold when it gets wet.

Which ever substrate you choose, it needs to be cleaned daily. By this, I mean, if using paper towels/newspaper, change it daily, if using sand, use a sifter and clean out all of the fecal matter and food daily, or sometimes multiple times a day. The more you clean, the less of a chance there is that your dragon will contact a disease from walking through their fecal matter (and trust me, they will, even if their cage is HUGE), or from eating a cricket that has been munching on its poop. As said above, any sand should be replaced at least every 3 months. More often is always better though. If using tile, clean up is simple with a paper towel or a moist wipe.

Furniture:

Remember when dealing with beardies, less is better! Bearded Dragons are desert creatures and as a rule of thumb don't generally have a lot of obstacles in their way. The most you will need in their cage is: a food bowl (which can be as simple as a water catcher from a plastic flower pot- they come in all sizes), a hiding spot (which I have found can also be made out of those plastic water catchers, just by cutting a section out of the side for an entrance), and a basking spot (I like using a piece of slate or river rock- this too can be very inexpensive). Now, I know that sometimes you just can't pass up that cute fake tree, or whatever else you may find appealing, but remember, the more furniture you have, the more places for food to hide. So, if you have a lot of furniture in your cage, take it out at feeding time, and don't put it back in until you're sure that all of the little critters have been eaten or taken out.

Lighting:

All Bearded Dragons need access to quality UVB lighting, along with some sort of basking lamp. If you are using a fluorescent UVB light like a Reptisun 10, than the most you need for a basking lamp is a standard household bulb. Any bright light that puts off enough heat to raise the basking temps to the right level will work fine. If your dragon has a small cage, you can get a UVB basking lamp, and that will act like 2 in 1. As far as cost is concerned though, the UVB strip light is the better way to go. They last for 6 months, where when using the UVB basking lamp bulbs, they tend to last a month or so, if you're lucky. When using a basking lamp, remember to leave it off to one side of the cage, preferably over the side where the slate/river

rock is. This way if your little Beardie gets too hot, he can move off to one side of the cage and cool down. It is important that they have an area to cool down if needed.

UVB bulbs are needed to help the dragons produce their own vitamin D3, which in turn helps them metabolize calcium. This helps prevent some diseases such as MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease). The dragon need to be within 12 inches of the UVB bulb though for it to be effective. These bulbs as said before, will need to be replaced every 6 months, the light will still work, however the dragons will not get the UVB rays that it needs. Also, as said before, ALWAYS make sure that your basking lamp is off to one side of the cage only. This is very important! You could easily cook your lizard! This goes along with making sure that you don't get too high of a wattage. A 10 gallon aquarium does not need a 150 watt light bulb. A 50 watt is more than enough. You also want to make sure that you don't have a lizard in a cage that is too small for it. You may have a 10 gallon aquarium and a 50 watt bulb, but your 12 inch long lizard is not going to be able to get far enough out of the heat to cool off and will wind up overheating and possibly dying. Never use heat rocks! These are very dangerous tools as beardies can not feel the heat on their tummies, and therefore cannot tell that they are being burned!

Heat temperatures need to range from 90-110 degrees in the basking area. Adults do better in the temperature range of 90-100 degrees in the basking spot. Juveniles need it a bit hotter, up to 110 degrees in the basking spot. Make sure your dragon has a cool area of the cage to retreat to. The cool spot of the cage should be at least 80 degrees. This helps them to regulate their own temperatures and digest their food properly. Night time temperatures can be as low as 65 degrees. Any cooler than this and you may want to think about putting a heater under the cage.

Light cycles for your Bearded Dragons should be as follows: in the summer, the lights should be on 10-14 hours, and in the winter, the lights should be on 8-10 hours. As a good rule of thumb, I follow the sun. When the sun comes up, turn the lights on and when it goes down, turn them off. This helps keep it as natural as possible. To keep them on a more regular schedule, a timer is wonderful! Do not leave any lights on over night!

Water:

There is no need to put a water bowl in with your Bearded Dragon. Some can be taught to drink out of it, but ultimately it can become a breeding ground for some nasty bacteria (due to feces and/or drowned crickets). Your dragon will most likely run through it and fill it up with sand not 2 minutes after you put it in there any ways. If you do however decide to provide your dragon with a water bowl, make sure it is cleaned daily.

Your dragon can get water many other ways. First, through the food it eats. Lots of greens, fruits and most veggies provide them with water, and if you mist it before feeding, that adds to it. Second, I recommend spraying babies/juveniles daily with a water bottle or use a dropper to drip water on their nose. This simulates rain, and the dragons will instinctively lift their heads and lick the water out of the air, or tip their heads to the ground and let the water roll from the top of their heads into their mouths, and will also drink out of the new puddles. Continue to spray them until they stop drinking. Third, I recommend for adults that you give them a weekly bath in lukewarm water. They will drink while they are soaking, and it will also help them relieve themselves if they've been a little constipated. You may also spray your adult dragons, but I've found that in order for them to receive the amount of water they need to sustain them for the week, you will be

spraying them for a very long time.

Feeding:

Bearded Dragons are voracious eaters and this is perhaps the reason that they are one of the most chosen pets as a reptile companion. They will actively chase crickets and other sorts of insects, but will also consume great amounts of fruit/vegetable matter. Remember, as said before, when ever feeding your Bearded Dragon NEVER to give them anything larger than the space between their eyes. It is always a good idea to give your dragons more of a smaller food item, than less of a bigger one.

It is, in my opinion, better to feed your dragon it's greens/fruit/veggies first thing in the morning, before they have had a chance to fill up on insects. Greens/fruits/veggies are an important part of their diet giving them tons of vitamins and minerals that they won't get from just insects alone. First thing in the morning, your dragon has had a chance to sleep off it's last meal, and once warmed up by it's lights, should be pretty ravenous, giving you a better chance to make sure he eats his greens. Some great food items to try are as follows:

Leafy Greens:

- Collard Greens
- Mustard Greens
- Turnip Greens
- (These three are all great staples!)
- Dandelion Greens
- Escarole
- Chicory
- Romaine Lettuce
- Alfalfa
- Endive
- Bok Choy
- Watercress
- Red Lettuces

* A great way to serve these is to choose one of the staples, then add in some of the other greens. Remember to keep it interesting!

Vegetables:

- Winter Squashes (Butternut, Acorn, Spaghetti)
- Summer Squashes
- Green Beans
- Carrots
- Sweet Potatoes
- Peas
- Wheat Grass
- Turnip

Zucchini
Bell Peppers (Green, Yellow and Red. Red helps to stimulate the appetite!)
Celery
Cucumber (not very nutritional, but a great source of water!)

Fruit:

Berries (Strawberries, Black Berries, Blue Berries, Cranberries)
Mango
Papaya
Grapes
Melons
Apples
Cherries
Naval Oranges
Peaches
Pineapple
Kiwi
Bananas

Treats:

Hibiscus Flowers and leaves (Great source of vitamins, just make sure there are no pesticides on them)
Hard Boiled Egg

Babies should be kept on a diet of mostly salads. Wait until they are a little older before you introduce the fruits and veggies. Juveniles and Adults should be given a salad base with 2 or more veggies and one fruit on top. My guys love theirs being prepared this way and readily eat it up. Make sure you leave this in the cage all day, that way if your beardedie gets hungry he will have something readily available for him to snack on.

Insects should be offered to babies 2 to 3 times a day and Adults once daily. As dragons age, they require less and less insects and more and more vegetable matter to get the nutrition they need for that stage of growth. The same goes for their vitamin and mineral supplements. Babies need their insects to be dusted daily with Calcium to help support their fast growing bones, and once weekly with a multivitamin. Adults, however need insects to be dusted every other day with Calcium and once weekly with the multivitamin. Now, the stomach contents of wild dragons have been found to contain 90% vegetable matter, and as adults, insects should only make up 10-50% of their daily diet.

Silkworms have now been found to be the perfect staple diet for Bearded Dragons. They are nice and soft, so they have no problem being digested, and are full of vitamins, they don't even need to be supplemented! Not to mention the beardies just love them! Silkworms need to be fed a silkworm "chow"; which is available from where ever you decide to buy the silkworms from, along with directions on how to prepare and use it.

Crickets are another great insect to feed your dragon. These are relatively inexpensive, they are not hard to find, and they are pretty easy to take care of. Crickets do need to be dusted and gut loaded to increase their nutritional content though. It is lots of fun to watch your dragon hunt down these crickets, and it'll provide

them with some good exercise too! Now, some cricket care tips, provide them with egg crates (you can fit more in a container if you provide a lot of places for them to hide, gel water or some sort of fruit or veggie is preferred for water (the crickets will drown themselves), and there are many different kinds of cricket foods on the market, or you can put two steps into one and feed them lots of fresh fruits and veggies.

Superworms are yet another great insect to feed to your dragons. They can be fed to the dragons daily and have pretty much the same nutritional content as crickets, so they will still need to be dusted with a vitamin supplement. Superworms are very easy to care for as well. They do NOT need to be stored in the refrigerator (this will KILL them!), all you need is a plastic shoe box, or any container with slick walls so that they cannot climb out, some oatmeal as a substrate and also a piece of potato, or a carrot. They will eat the oatmeal (when it becomes sandy, it's time to add more or change it) and the potato or carrot will provide all the moisture they need. As long as you house lots of superworms together, they will NOT turn into beetles, and their lifespan can be as long as 3 months.

Mealworms are great for helping picky eaters eat. Many times I've had babies that are a little on the slow side when it comes to eating and hunting down prey, but they perk up at the sight of a mealworm. This leads to them being more interested in eating other types of insects and eventually they will readily accept other forms of prey. Mealworms are however high in chitin and fat and should not be fed on a regular basis. They are better as an occasional treat. Mealworms are relatively easy to maintain also, put them in a shoe box with some oatmeal as a substrate, then stick them in the fridge. Being in the cold puts them into a dormant state and in there they will last for months. Just make sure you take them out every once and a while and put some sort of vegetable in there so they can feed and get the moisture out of it.

Wax worms are also another great treat. They are a type of soft bodied grub. Dragons will eat these guys like candy, but make sure they are only given occasionally because they are also high in fat. Wax worms can be stored in the fridge also with oatmeal as a substrate.

When feeding your dragon, feed them only as many insects as they can eat in a 20-30 minute period, then remove any uneaten insects. Do not recycle these, this can spread disease. If you put a cricket in an infected dragons container and it is not promptly eaten, it finds things to do such as eating dragon feces. From this point if you were to reintroduce it into the remaining cricket colony, it will infect the whole colony and there fore when you feed your dragons every one of them will be eating infected crickets. When the original infected dragon eats an infected cricket, it can double the amount of damage being done to your dragon. It is best to throw away or flush any uneaten insects. Another scenario to picture is a bored cricket in your dragon tank, the cricket has to eat, so they like to munch on sleeping dragons, and when they nibble on your pet they can cause serious injury!

Pinkie mice can also be fed to your dragons about occasionally to your dragons no more than once a month and are best given to gravid females being that they are very high in fat.

*******NEVER FEED FIREFLIES TO YOUR DRAGON!! THEY ARE VERY TOXIC AND WILL CAUSE ALMOST INSTANT DEATH!!*******