

## FACT SHEET: TORTOISES



### Temperature and Humidity

Tortoises are reptiles and therefore rely on the environment to provide sufficient heat to keep their bodies warm enough for their metabolism to work properly. Depending on their country of origin, they have differing preferred optimum temperature zones (POTZ's), which is the temperature at which the reptile is best able to maintain its body temperature for optimum metabolism. For Mediterranean tortoises, this is between 20 and 27°C. This means that during the average British spring and autumn (and some summers) tortoises will need an inside area with a heat source where they can keep themselves warm.

The natural environment of a Mediterranean tortoise is quite arid, so high levels of humidity are not important. Relative humidity of between 25 – 50% is their ideal range – this is around the normal level in a centrally heated house. Tortoises should always have access to fresh water for bathing and drinking.

### Diet

Tortoises are herbivorous and should be able to forage for their food, as they are naturally quite active animals - despite their reputation - and live on low growing vegetation in their natural environment. Ideally during the summer, an adult tortoise should have the run of a large area of garden. An ideal balanced diet for a tortoise should include the following:

#### Main Diet

Dandelions, kale, watercress, flat-leaved parsley, chickory, bok-choi

### Daily Supplement

Peas, beans, hay, fresh picked grass (NOT lawn clippings), grated carrot & pumpkin, sweet peppers

### Treats

Small volumes of fruit, some flowers, i.e. dandelion, nasturtiums, rose, Sprouted seeds

### Dietary Supplement

Dietary supplements should be fed regularly; in our experience Vetark is the most reliable brand for reptile supplements.

A small amount of lettuce is good for a treat but is not a good basis for a nutritionally balanced diet.

### **Hibernation**

Juvenile tortoises should not be hibernated until their shell is at least 5 – 6 inches in length as, before they get to that size, they do not have sufficient body fat reserves for the prolonged period of starvation.

The period for which a tortoise should be hibernated depends on the temperature at which it will be kept. Lower temperatures allow a longer hibernation, but need to be controlled more accurately as frost damage can cause blindness and death. At the other extreme, a slightly too warm hibernation temperature can cause the metabolism to speed up, using vital reserves without the tortoise waking up. Hibernation should be between 6 and 12 weeks depending on the age, health and breed of tortoise – shorter periods being for younger tortoises and those from warmer climates where they do not naturally hibernate for long periods of time (e.g. Greek tortoises).

The ideal hibernation temperature is 6 – 8°C. The ambient temperature should be checked every day while the tortoise is in hibernation to ensure that no peaks or troughs in temperature occur, which could adversely affect your tortoise while it hibernates. A fridge can be used for hibernation, but this must be dedicated to tortoises to

prevent contamination of human foodstuffs. The temperature should be monitored daily to ensure that the tortoise remains healthy.

Before hibernation, it is important that the tortoise gradually empties its digestive tract as any food left in the guts may cause severe illness.