

DiaMondBusteR Dragons Caresheets



“Alive In The Land of The Living Dragons”

--=Jeff Stewart=--

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The information presented herein represents the views of the author as of the date of publication. This report is for informational purposes only and the author does not except any responsibilities for any liabilities resulting from the use of this information.

Please give these caresheets away to anyone who is in need of them!



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Properly cared for bearded dragons make one of the best pet reptiles available. Their needs are not too complex but without proper care they can become ill.

You will find that experienced keepers have differences of opinions on which substrates, ultraviolet light sources or insects are "the best". Don't let this controversy overwhelm or confuse you.

The following recommendations are based on what has worked well for myself and numerous others. It's best to do your research, gather different views and information, and reach your own conclusion.

Unfortunately misinformation from uninformed pet shop employees abounds. For further reading please check out the recommended links provided to some of the best and most reliable resources available.

Substrate is a highly debated topic. Particulate substrates (walnut shells, lizard litter, Carefresh, and Calci-Sand) can cause potentially lethal impaction when ingested. Many keepers successfully use paper towels for babies, and alfalfa rabbit pellets or washed playsand for juveniles and adults. Dragons kept on playsand should be fed in a separate enclosure to eliminate the risk of impaction from consuming sand while capturing prey insects. I have had the best luck with paper towels for babies and playsand for juveniles and adults. Be aware that alfalfa rabbit pellets can grow mold or fungus if they get wet from spilled water. This can create health hazards.

Lighting and heating are crucial to your dragon's well being. The necessary heat, light and UVB can be provided with a household light bulb and a the Reptisun 5.0 or Exoterra 8.0 . These fluorescents should be replaced every 6 months. For MVB, the best currently is the Mega-Ray EB, followed by the Mega-Ray SB (both from <http://reptileuv.com>).

Basking site temperature must reach 90 - 110 degrees in order for your dragon to remain healthy, alert, and digest its food properly. Your dragon will thermoregulate by gaping or moving to the cooler end of the tank. The ability to thermoregulate to a cooler spot is essential. Nighttime heating is unnecessary unless temperatures drop below 40

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degrees at night. Do not guess about temperatures. A digital thermometer to monitor your basking site temperature is an absolute must. Dial thermometers are not accurate enough. Daily photoperiod should range from 10 - 14 hours, with the longest photoperiod during the longest summer days, gradually shortening during the fall and winter months to 8 - 10 hours per day. When spring arrives you can gradually increase your daily photoperiod in one-hour increments per week, until you reach 14 hours per day again.

Enclosure size should be a minimum of 60 gallons for one or two adults. Babies and juveniles can be housed in a 20 gallon tank. Screen or hardware cloth tops are a must for keeping beardies in and other pets and unsupervised children out. Hardware cloth tops can be made quickly and easily by cutting a piece of hardware cloth an inch larger than your enclosure on all four sides and folding down the 1" overhang. I like to split hardware cloth tops in the middle to create easy access for feeding, cleaning and handling without disturbing the lights. Some keepers build homemade enclosures using wood, melamine, and glass or Plexiglas with a hardware cloth or screen top. It's also very nice to have a secure outdoor sunning enclosure for hot days. Magnification of the heat from the sun in a glass or plastic enclosure will quickly cook your dragon. Therefore it is necessary to use some sort of screen, mesh or hardware cloth for adequate ventilation when sunning outdoors. You can order a lightweight mesh Reptarium for outdoor sunning at <http://www.illreptile.com/reptariums.html>. Always be sure to provide a hide cave or some form of shade when sunning your dragon outdoors.

Furniture should include a stable large branch or piece of driftwood for climbing and basking. Additionally, a rock placed directly under the heat source warms up nicely for basking. When placing the rock in the tank, make sure it is placed on the bottom surface of the enclosure and then add substrate around it, or place the rock on a stable piece of wood to prevent your dragon from digging under and getting crushed by the weight. Rocks and wood should be sprayed and soaked for 10 minutes with Nolvasan, a reptile safe disinfectant (or the generic: Chlorhexidine Diacetate which can be obtained at The Bean Farm at <http://www.beanfarm.com> and left in an oven at 250 degrees for an hour to eliminate bacteria and parasites. See below for information on cleaning and disinfection. A hiding cave should be provided for the occasional need for privacy. I like to use desert backgrounds applied to the outside of the back of the tank. I prefer

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artificial desert plants over live plants as they have no water or temperature requirements, are easy to clean and disinfect, and they don't attract parasites.

Cleaning and disinfection is an important part of good husbandry. Feces and leftover food should be removed daily. Substrate should be removed monthly and enclosure should be sprayed with diluted Nolvasan (or the generic: Chlorhexidine Diacetate which can be obtained at The Bean Farm at <http://www.beanfarm.com> and rinsed by wiping out several times with a hot wet towel, using special care in corners. All furniture such as rocks, wood, fake plants etc. should be sprayed with diluted Nolvasan and soaked for 10 minutes and rinsed and dried thoroughly before replacing. Wood and rocks can be placed in the oven at 250 degrees. I don't like to use bleach as it's environmentally unsound, and the fumes can be quite toxic to your beardie if not rinsed very well and aired out completely before exposure. Window cleaner containing ammonia should not be used on the interior of your enclosure. Food and water bowls must be washed with hot soapy water daily.

Organic Greens and Veggies must be provided fresh daily. Spinach and lettuce should be avoided. Spinach is high in oxalic acid and binds calcium. Lettuce is low in nutritional value. Staples should include the following high calcium greens:

Collards Greens
Mustard Greens
Dandelion, Dandelion Greens
Endive
Escarole

Other Great Greens and Veggies to Feed. Turnip Greens, Chickory Greens, Zucchini, Clover, Bean Sprouts, Beet Greens, Sunflower Seedlings, Carrots (shredded), Peas, Parsley, Beans, Purslane, Kale, Squash, Parsnip (shredded), Bok Choy.

Aviod Spinach

Spinach contains a large amount of oxalic acid, which binds with calcium, rendering the calcium unusable by the animal. Over time, this causes metabolic bone disease, with the body reabsorbing calcium

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from the bones to use for normal metabolic and cellular processes. Most of the dark greens contain oxalic acid but spinach contains the most. The high amount of oxalic acid may also cause gout over a period of time.....However, bok choy is a brassica, and can cause hypothyroidism, a thyroid deficiency, when fed in excess. Some is fine, but make sure they eat other greens as well.

Here is a great link for [Nutritional Content](#)

I prepare a week's worth of salad at a time by washing, drying (with a salad spinner), finely chopping and storing greens in Ziploc bags with a dry paper towel. Mist the salad heavily with a spray water bottle before serving. Green beans, grated carrots, celery tops, strawberry tops, basil, cilantro, bok choy, finely grated zucchini, fresh pumpkin, or winter squash can also be added to the staple salad mix occasionally. Many dragons also enjoy occasional fruits such as mango or berries.

Insects should be offered to babies three times daily, to juveniles daily, and to adults 4 to 7 days per week. The feeding of crickets should take place in a separate feeding enclosure where they cannot hide and later pester your dragon. Adult Bearded Dragons are notorious for overeating. It is not unusual for beardies in the wild to go days at a time without eating. There have been numerous cases of necropsies performed on beardies after they have died which have shown kidney damage due to excessive protein. I try to emphasize greens and veggies by offering them first thing in the morning when they're hungry, and withholding insects until noon. This encourages the development of a healthy dietary regimen. There is a tendency for many keepers to powerfeed along with providing temperatures at the high end of the range in order to accelerate growth for breeding. This is thought by some to increase their metabolism in the short run, but shorten life span in the long run.

Crickets are a good staple insect for babies, as long as they are smaller than the distance between your dragon's eyes. Young beardies will try to consume insects that are too large for them and this can apply pressure to a nerve which can lead to fatal impaction. Never offer more crickets than your dragon can consume in 5 or 10 minutes, and always remove uneaten crickets before lights go out as crickets will feed on dragon flesh, tender eyelids in particular. Crickets can be kept on oatmeal for substrate and gut loaded on a blended dry mix of organic

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dry dogfood and calcium supplement powder. A slice of orange, potato or water bites must be provided for moisture. Stems of veggies that can't be given to dragons can be fed to crickets.

Silkworms are a favorite staple of mine, particularly for babies and juveniles under 12" who are not yet eating superworms. Silkworms are soft and have no crispy chitin outer shell like crickets, mealworms and superworms, thus eliminating the risk of fatal impaction. They are high in water content which aids in hydration. They dust nicely. If you have to administer medication you can squirt the meds with a syringe onto the silkworm and hand feed it non invasively with out having to force the meds down with a syringe. Silkworms can be fed fresh mulberry leaves or commercially prepared silkworm chow. They can be obtained from Brian at <http://www.mulberryfarms.com>

Superworms can be given in moderation (no more than 2 or 3 per feeding) to dragons once they reach 12". They make a nice staple insect since they don't chirp or jump. They are easy to keep. I use oatmeal as a substrate. Gutload them with a blended mix of organic dry dogfood and calcium supplement powder.

Cockroaches can be fed as babies or when freshly shed.

Mealworms are smaller and have more chitin proportionally than superworms. Therefore, I do not use or recommend mealworms.

Waxworms can be fed as on occasional treat only. They are very high in fat and are best reserved for females around egg laying time.

Wild caught insects should be avoided unless you are certain there is no risk of exposure to pesticides.

Supplementation with MinerAll Calcium by Sticky Tongue Farms, should be provided daily to babies and juveniles and every other day to fully grown adults, without Vitamin D3 if you provide frequent natural sunlight or UVHeat. Otherwise use MinerAll with D3. If you use MinerAll Calcium, you will also need to dust insects with a small amount of Herptivite multivitamins by Rep-Cal once per week.

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Water can be provided by misting your dragon and their greens daily with a fine mist spray bottle, and with a 10 minute soaking in shoulder deep warm (not hot) water once per week in the bathtub, bathroom sink or a Rubbermaid tub. Beardies don't often drink from standing pools of water, but will sometimes drink their bath water while soaking, or lap misted water off of their nose. When in optimal health, they will get most of their moisture from their veggies and insects. I don't recommend keeping a water bowl in the enclosure because they often spill and defecate in it. Daily misting and weekly baths will help your dragon stay well hydrated. During times of illness or treatment with medication, additional electrolyte fluids like diluted Pedialyte can be given through a needles syringe.

Handling should be a relaxing, enjoyable time for you and your dragon. Young dragons should not be carried across concrete or hard tile floors because if they suddenly jump, they can break bones. It's best to sit down on a couch, chair, or bed and let them hang out on your hand, leg, chest or shoulder while you earn their trust. The key to taming is to eliminate their fear of you as a predator. They should always have a harness on when outdoors in an unenclosed area. Bearded Dragons have been known to suddenly take off when startled by a bird or plane flying overhead.

Handwashing with soap and hot water after handling is of utmost importance. Salmonella is a naturally occurring bacteria in the gut and feces of reptiles. For this reason food, water dishes, and cage furnishings should not be washed in the kitchen.

Brumation occurs most often during the fall or winter (when daily photoperiod is shortened) during the second year of life. Brumation is a semi-dormant period of inactivity, but not a complete physiological shut down like hibernation. It generally lasts 2 or 3 months, sometimes even longer. It is not necessary to force brumation if your dragon doesn't initiate it. If your dragon decides to brumate, temperatures can slowly be lowered over a 2 week period to 85 degrees for 8 hours per day. If your dragon appears to want to brumate, give him or her a warm soak to aid in hydration and to assist in having a bowel movement. Undigested food rotting during brumation can cause problems. Prior to brumating, your dragon should be well hydrated and in good health and weight. It's a good idea to have a fecal exam performed for parasites and coccidia prior to brumation. When your dragon slowly begins to awaken and

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become active again another warm soak will allow them to drink and eliminate if needed. It often takes time before they begin feeding again.

Fecal exams for parasites and coccidia should be performed by a veterinarian on all newly acquired bearded dragons, and annually thereafter. All newly acquired animals should be quarantined from others for at least one month, and a fecal exam should be performed to eliminate the possibility of parasites, coccidia, viruses, and bacterial or fungal infections being passed along to your animals. Many vets will perform a fecal without seeing the animal, but they are required by law to see the animal before administering medication if they test positive.

To find a veterinarian in your area click here:

www.herpvetconnection.com



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