

# Bearded Dragon Care Sheet

This is what you will need for your new bearded Dragon

1. **A Secure Enclosure;** Juvenile bearded dragons can be kept in an enclosure as small as a 20 gallon aquarium, but the adults usually reach 18-22 inches and will require the equivalent a 55 gallon aquarium or larger. If you use an aquarium you will need a screen top (made of metal) that can be secured.
2. **Substrate;** There are many substrate options and even more opinions on what and what not to use. Your juvenile bearded dragon should be kept on a newspaper, paper towel, shelf liner, etc until they are 8-9 inches long. Then you may elect to try something else.
3. **Heating & Lighting;** Both heat & light are important for the health of your dragon. Dragons need full spectrum (UVB) light, and a heating/basking light. You can use 2 separate lights, an incandescent light for heat/basking and a fluorescent light for UVB. Or you may opt to use a Full spectrum heating & UVB incandescent light. The enclosure should contain a temperature gradient with the temp at the basking spot 105°-110 °, and the cool end of the enclosure should be around 75 °. You may need to get a thermometer. The heat & light should be on a plug in timer, which you can pick up just about anywhere for about \$5.00, for 12 hour on & off during the night. DO NOT use hot rocks or undertank heaters.
4. **Cage Furnishings;** The minimum requirements for furniture/decorations is something for your dragon to climb on (preferably under/near the basking light & UVB light so they can regulate their temperature and the amount of UVB they are getting), some sort of a hide/cave, and a food dish..
5. **Food & Supplements;** Bearded dragons do well on a mixed diet of greens, vegetables, & insects. There are also some "pellets" and freeze dried mixtures that can be used, but some dragons may refuse to eat them. The dietary requirements change as your dragon ages, but they all should be fed a variety of insects & greens. For hard bodied insects (crickets, roaches, etc.) the insect's body should not be longer than the space between the dragon's eyes. Adults can eat larger insects as long as they are soft bodied (Butter worms, Hornworms, etc.). Hatchlings should be fed 1/4 - 3/8 inch crickets 3-4 times per day, juvenile dragons 1/2 – 1 inch crickets 1-2 times per day, and adults should be fed insects once per day or every other day. Your dragon should first be fed insects starting an hour after the lights come on to allow them time to warm up. They should be fed as many insects as they can eat in 10-15 minutes, and it may take some time to determine the correct amount. **Do not feed your dragon Mealworms, they are not able to easily digest the chitin and it can cause impaction. Do not feed them any meat or chicken because it is too high in protein and can kill them.** All insects should be dusted daily with a calcium supplement with or without vitamin D3. This is critical to bone growth. Calcium with Vitamin D3 should not be considered a substitute for exposure to UVB light. Once a week the insects should also be dusted or sprayed with a reptile multivitamin. Adding this more than once/week may lead to health issues due to the high levels of some of the vitamins. Chopped/torn greens and vegetables should be fed every day, with the majority being greens that are high in calcium and low in phosphorous. Some of the staple greens we use are collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, & dandelion greens. They should be washed thoroughly and cut/torn into small pieces. Bearded dragons like variety so we try to mix up the staple greens and also the vegetables that we add for color & flavor. We frequently use mixed vegetable, acorn or butternut squash, bell peppers (various colors), okra, kale, alfalfa, bok choy, apples, carrots, chicory, parsley, & parsnip. There are also some fruits, vegetables, & flowers that may be given as an occasional treat. We feed greens every day. We put them in the enclosures about 1 hour after the lights go on and remove them from the enclosures about 1 hour before the lights out so we can clean & disinfect the dishes.
6. **Water;** While bearded dragons get most of their water from the food they eat, they should be misted at once/day. Mist your dragon, then wait a minute & mist them again. Avoid excessive misting (more than 2-3 time/day) as it can prevent them from warming up and interfere with the digestion of their food. They will also enjoy and will benefit from a weekly bath. You can use a plastic container, filled up to their shoulders with slightly warm water. The enclosure can also include a water bowl or pool. If you chose to use a pool, use one that is not deeper than the height of the dragon at the shoulders and is easy to get into and out of. Some dragons will drink from a dish, and most dragons enjoy a dip in the pool/bath. In fact it helps them to poop, so be prepared to remove them from the pool/bath to disinfect the container. Do not allow them to remain in the water with their poop.
7. **Handling your bearded Dragon;** when you purchase a bearded dragon, it may take some time for it to become acclimated with its new surroundings and feeding schedule. Allow them a few days to become accustomed to their new environment before trying to handle them. They may also stop eating while this is going on. Once they become acclimated, short periods of handling and hand feeding is usually all that is required to form a bond with your friend. Be careful, they may jump or try to escape and may fall and get hurt. Always wash your hands before & after handling any animal. Many of the everyday chemicals that we use may be harmful to your dragon. Some reptiles may also carry pathogens, most commonly salmonella which they can get from the food & insects they eat. This does not mean that they are infected, just that they carry the pathogen, most commonly in their excrement. This is one of the reasons why cleanliness & good housekeeping is so important. If you allow your friend to tromp through his poop & food, or remain in the bath after they have done their business, then they may become infected. This is the same pathogen that is in eggs and raw poultry, so it is no more dangerous than cooking breakfast or dinner.
8. **Housekeeping;** Bearded dragons eat a lot, especially Juvenile dragons. This means that they also poop a lot. It is critical that you continuously spot clean the enclosure and change the paper towel daily. The enclosure should be disinfected frequently with a 10% bleach solution, rinsed thoroughly, and dried. You can also use one of the commercially available **reptile enclosure cleaners**. Do not use household cleaners as they may contain ingredients that are toxic to bearded dragons.
9. **A vet who treats reptiles;** No matter how well you take care of your dragon, they may get sick or hurt and you will need a vet who treats reptiles, not all do. It is well worth the effort to find and talk to a vet who treats reptiles before you need one. A good way is to get your new pet a checkup. That provides you an opportunity to talk to the vet and observe how they handle your pet, and also assures you the animal you bought is healthy. I would recommend waiting until your new pet has become comfortable with their new surroundings.

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