

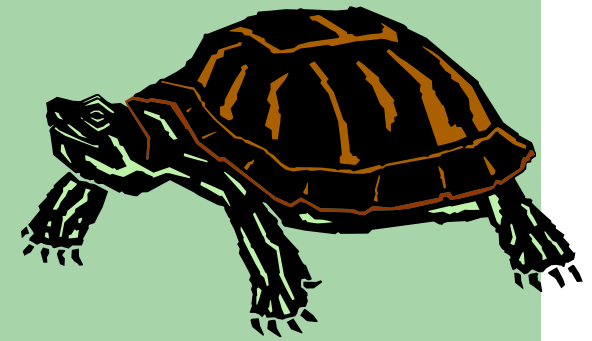
Painted turtles, red eared sliders and other water turtles are popular pets but can be difficult to care for properly. Retailers are not supposed to sell these reptiles until their shell size is greater than 3.5 inches to help decrease disease spread to humans, but all reptiles can occasionally carry harmful bacteria. Children often put their hands in their mouths, so they can contract bacteria from pet reptiles. Because of the difficulty of proper care and the potential for bacterial spread, water turtles are not recommended as pets for children.



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Care and Husbandry of Water Turtles



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Diet

Water turtles are omnivores (eat a variety of plants and animals). Juvenile turtles eat a predominantly carnivorous diet (worms, insects, tadpoles and crustaceans), but begin eating vegetation as they mature. Commercial pellets meet most of the turtle's nutritional needs, but sometimes lead to calcium deficiencies, obesity and digestive problems. Live foods are rich in minerals and vitamins that challenge the gut. Bones scales and other tissue keeps the lining of the stomach and intestines strong and more impervious to infection. Teach young turtles to eat in an easy to clean container. This will keep debris and defecations to a minimum in their enclosure for easier maintenance. Most turtles will begin eating green, leafy vegetables as they grow, so do not give up on offering them at least a few times each week.

Hibernation

It is not recommended for anyone, except very experienced hobbyists to hibernate turtles during the winter.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

Turtles that eat pellets, a variety of live foods and green leafy vegetables do not require supplements. If the turtles do not accept a variety of foods, a powdered supplement should be sprinkled on the food a few times each week.

Ultraviolet light

Artificial sunlight (ultraviolet light in the UV-B spectrum) is needed by all reptiles. Exposure to sunlight causes their skin to produce vitamin D3. Vitamin D3 is needed for reptiles to uptake calcium from the foods they eat. The UV-B light source must be within 12 inches from the turtles basking area and the bulb needs to be changed every 6 months to ensure potency. The added light may increase algae growth, but algae will not hurt turtles and can be scraped off when the environment is cleaned. Turtles that are not provided with sufficient UV-B light will develop shell abnormalities, beak abnormalities and possible immune system problems.

Heat

Water turtles require an external heat source. Their basking area should reach 80-88°F and the water should be 70-75°F. When turtles are kept too cool, they often stop eating and are prone to respiratory infections.

Husbandry

A water turtle's environment must be kept clean to prevent disease. Special filters that are designed to remove the larger waste produced by turtles should be used and 50% of the water needs to be changed every week. When the turtles are small the entire aquarium or enclosure can be dumped, but when they are moved into larger enclosures, filters and water changes will be necessary. The chlorine can be removed from the fresh water with products used for fish tanks. Whenever possible feed your turtles in a small, easy to clean container, then wait for them to defecate and replace them in their enclosure. This will save hours of cleaning and possible prevent a lot of disease.