

Pet Care of a Bearded Dragon



Bearded dragons are from the lizard species. They are often referred to as “beardies” and are one of the most popular lizards in captivity in the UK. Their name comes from the spikey folds of skin around their neck, which inflate and turn black when they are excited or defending themselves.

They originate from the dry scrublands and woodlands of Australia, therefore in captivity they need their environment to replicate their natural surroundings in the wild.

Environment

Bearded dragons must be kept in a vivarium. This is a large, secure, glass enclosure. A recommended size to accommodate one lizard is a vivarium which is 120cm long and 60cm high. Beardies can grow up to 45cm long and need room to move around and stretch out.

As bearded dragons are ectothermic and use the environment to regulate their body temperature, they need a warm end of the vivarium and a cool end. There must also be a basking zone, which is the warmest part of the enclosure. They like to lie, or bask, on a natural stone near the heat lamp provided. A thermostat must be installed to ensure the temperature doesn't fluctuate. It must not drop below 22°C at night.

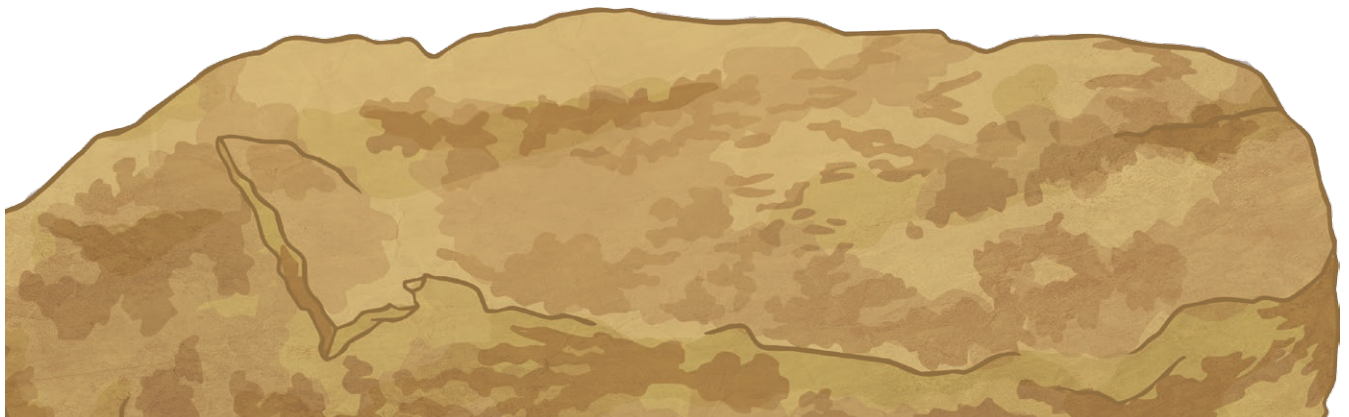
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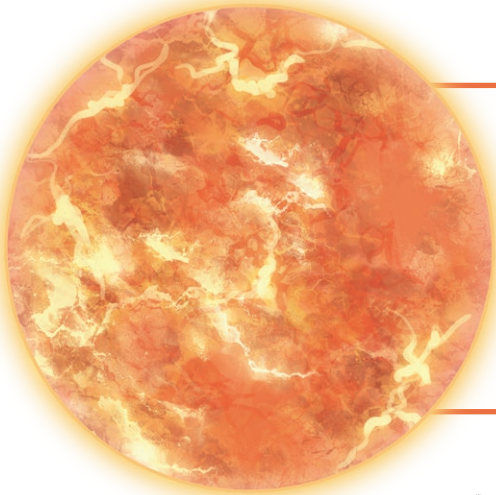
The base of the vivarium needs to be covered with a sand and soil mixture, due to the bearded dragon's natural instinct to dig. Stone tiles should have ridges to help the reptile grip.



Did You Know?

Bearded dragons are diurnal which means they are active during the day.





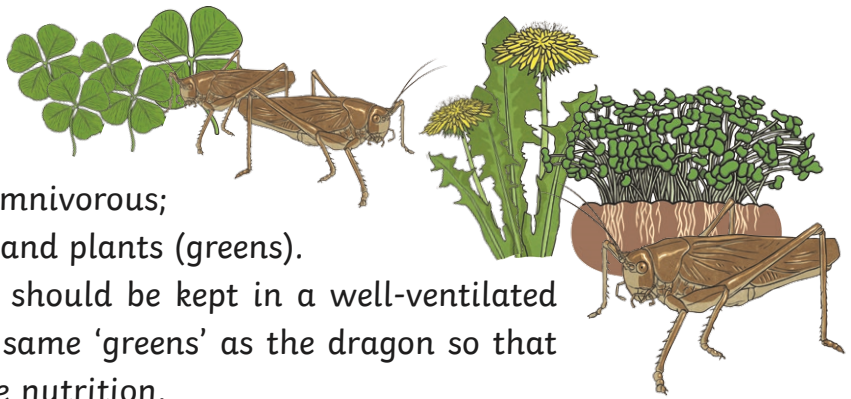
Light

Lizards use the ultraviolet light from the sun to make vitamin D in their skin. This is essential for the storage and use of calcium in their bodies. A special UV light must be installed in their vivarium.

Diet

Bearded dragons are omnivorous; they eat live invertebrates and plants (greens).

They like live food, which should be kept in a well-ventilated container and fed the the same 'greens' as the dragon so that the lizard benefits from the nutrition.



Safe Greens	Live Food
watercress	
rocket	
criss	crickets
grated butternut squash	locusts
dandelions	calciworms
clover	
plantain leaves	

These lizards must not have spinach, as it affects the dragon's ability to absorb calcium into their bodies.

Feeding Tips

- Remove any uneaten live foods as they can bite the lizard;
- Cover the live food with supplement powder to ensure the lizard is getting all the nutrients it needs.

Two's Company

Bearded dragons are fiercely territorial. Males live a solitary life and in the wild, chase other males off their space. Females can fight if they are in groups - they have been known to bite the toes off other lizards and sometimes kill! Captive bearded dragons should be singular.

Signs of a healthy lizard:

- clear, bright eyes;
- thick base to its tail;
- hips will not be sticking out;
- bright colour after basking.

Signs of calcium deficiency:

- muscle twitching;
- swollen legs;
- fragile bones;
- deformed limbs, spine, jaw.

Sunbathing Lizard

A bearded dragon can be taken outside on sunny, warm days to feel the benefit of natural UV light. Shade must be available and the reptile must be constantly supervised.



Questions

1. Explain how bearded dragons came to be known by this name.

2. Why do you think their captive environment needs to replicate their natural environment?

3. Explain why the vivarium needs to be secure and large.

4. A thermostat must be installed to 'ensure the temperature doesn't fluctuate'. What does this mean?

5. A new owner of a bearded dragon is planning to put newspaper in the bottom of the vivarium. Explain what you think of this idea, and what other suggestions would you make?

6. Why do you think the live food that will be fed to the dragon needs to be fed and looked after?

7. What is the purpose of putting a powder supplement on the live food before giving it to the dragon?

8. Your friend is going to get a much larger vivarium and put three bearded dragons in there.

What would you tell them?

9. A bearded dragon has a swollen leg and one of its muscles is twitching. What could be wrong with it, what could have caused it and what might help, until you can get it to a reptile expert?

10. Write a definition for each of these words:

Diurnal: _____

Omnivore: _____

Ectothermic: _____

Answers

1. Explain how bearded dragons came to be known by this name.
Bearded dragons came by their name because they have spikey folds of skin around their neck which inflate and turn black when they get excited or look to protect themselves.
2. Why do you think their captive environment needs to replicate their natural environment?
Answers will vary. Possible points: they need to be healthy/ they are animals and need to be comfortable where they live/ their bodies are reliant on having particular conditions (ectothermic).
3. Explain why the vivarium needs to be secure and large.
The vivarium needs to be secure so that the lizard is safe and cannot escape. It needs to be large because bearded dragons grow to 45cm long and need to move around and stretch out.
4. A thermostat must be installed to 'ensure the temperature doesn't fluctuate'. What does this mean?
To 'ensure the temperature doesn't fluctuate' means that the thermostat will make sure that the temperature stays the same and doesn't go up or down.
5. A new owner of a bearded dragon is planning to put newspaper in the bottom of the vivarium. Explain what you think of this idea, and what other suggestions would you make?
I would tell the new owner that I don't think this is a good idea because bearded dragons instinctively like to dig, and they can't dig in newspaper. I would suggest they put a sand and soil mixture down so that the dragon can dig in it, as if it were in their natural environment.
6. Why do you think the live food that will be fed to the dragon needs to be fed and looked after?
I think that the live food needs to be fed and looked after because the dragon eats living food so it needs to be healthy in order to keep the dragon healthy too.

7. What is the purpose of putting a powder supplement on the live food before giving it to the dragon?

The purpose of putting a powder supplement on the live food before giving it to the dragon is to make sure it is getting all the nutrients it needs, as it would in the wild.

8. Your friend is going to get a much larger vivarium and put three bearded dragons in there. What would you tell them?

I would tell my friend that they should only keep one bearded dragon at a time, because they are territorial. The males chase each other off their space and the females bite the toes off other lizards and sometimes kill them.

9. A bearded dragon has a swollen leg and one of its muscles is twitching. What could be wrong with it, what could have caused it and what might help, until you can get it to a reptile expert?

If the bearded dragon has a swollen leg and one of its muscles is twitching, it could be suffering from a lack of calcium. One problem might be that it needs a UV light in the vivarium in order to make vitamin D in the skin, which helps the storage and use of calcium in the body. Also, it should not be given spinach because this stops calcium being absorbed within the body.

10. Write a definition for each of these words:

Diurnal - an animal which is active during the day.

Omnivore - an animal which eats animals and plants.

Ectothermic - an animal that uses its environment to control its body temperature.