

Prehistoric Pets Care Sheet

Russian Tortoises (Testudo horsfieldi)

General Information

Russian tortoises are found throughout central Asia. They are common in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan. Typical Russian tortoise habitat is dry and hot with cold winters. These tortoises are relatively small and adults rarely exceed eight inches. Males are smaller than females and have noticeably longer tails. Captive breeding is rare and females lay 1-5 eggs that hatch within 75 days.

Temperature and UV Lighting

Russian tortoises need be kept between 85-95 degrees during the day and the temperature can drop to about 60 at night. These tortoises are capable of hibernating but temperatures for proper hibernation need to be less than 60 degrees during the day. Russian tortoises require 12-14 hours of UVB light for proper health and growth. This light enables the tortoise to produce vitamin D3. The vitamin D3 produced by UVB metabolizes the calcium in the tortoises' diet. In general it's what makes tortoises' bones hard and without it they can die. This process of inadequate UVB and calcium is called Metabolic Bone Disease. When kept outdoors, no UVB lighting is needed, natural sunlight covers all requirements. Also it is very important to change your UVB light every 6-8 months, after this time the light stops producing adequate UVB. If you're not sure if your UV light is still producing UVB, bring it in and we'll be happy to test the light for you.



Housing

The cage for a Russian tortoise should be big enough for it to have room to move around easily. Our recommendation is a 40 gallon or larger terrarium. Russian tortoises can also be kept outside in areas where the weather is similar to their natural habitat. If you plan to keep your turtle outside make sure the area is secure. These tortoises can dig and have been known to escape under fences.

Bedding

Different beddings have positive and negative effects when used for reptiles. The best type of bedding for Russian tortoises would be cage carpet. Other types of beddings are fine sand, crushed walnut shells, or rabbit pellets. Certain types of sand can cause impactions in the intestine and kill baby tortoises. We feel that these types of impactions are rare and we have never personally encountered this problem. Make sure to provide a type of bedding that maintains a low humidity.

Calcium

Baby and juvenile tortoises should have calcium and vitamin supplement put on their vegetables everyday. This can be reduced to 1-2 times a week as an adult. When kept indoors the supplement must contain Vitamin D3, because the UVB light alone does not produce enough D3 by itself. Once the tortoise is large enough to live outdoors, you cannot use a D3 supplement. Natural sunlight allows the tortoise to produce the perfect amount of D3 to keep it healthy. Over supplementation of D3 can be harmful to your tortoise.

Food and Water

Russian tortoises should be fed grasses and mixed vegetables daily. They can be fed a variety of leafy greens such as collard greens, mustard greens, red leaf lettuce, green leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, dandelion greens, hibiscus leaves and flowers, green onions, spinach, green beans, zucchini, frozen mixed vegetables, timothy hay, and alfalfa. Fruits should only make up about 10% of their diet. Never feed your tortoise iceberg lettuce because it lacks the nutritional contents necessary for proper health. Russian tortoises get the water they need from the plants that they eat, however we recommend that you soak your tortoises two times a week in shallow water to prevent dehydration.

Cleaning and Handling

The terrarium should be cleaned as necessary. Any fecal matter or left over food should be cleaned out several times a week. The bedding should be completely changed once a month. The inside of the terrarium can be cleaned out with an appropriate reptile cage cleaner, we recommend Natural Chemistry's Healthy Habitat. Russian tortoises can be handled on a daily basis and always wash your hands before and after handling them.

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