THE TORTOISE HUT

TORTOISE CARE GUIDE FOR HORSFIELD, HERMANNS, GREEK SPUR THIGH & MARGINATED TORTOISES.

Essential information for your new tortoise

Welcome to tortoise ownership!

Thank you for choosing us as your tortoise supplier. We want to help you give your new tortoise the healthiest and happiest life possible.

Tortoises are fascinating animals with individual personalities and can make wonderful pets. However, they are a long-term commitment, with many species living for 50 years or more. Providing the correct environment, diet and daily care is essential to their health and wellbeing.

This guide covers the basics of caring for your Horsfield's or Mediterranean tortoise. Please read it carefully and keep it for future reference.

We are always happy to help if you have any questions.

---

1. DIET & NUTRITION

Tortoises are herbivores and require a varied diet that is naturally high in fibre and low in fat and protein.

Their diet should consist primarily of safe, natural weeds, flowers and leafy greens.

Recommended foods include:

- Dandelion leaves and flowers
- Clover
- Ribwort and broadleaf plantain
- Campanula
- Mallow
- Teasel
- Sow thistle
- Hawkweed
- Cats' ear
- Lamb's lettuce
- Hibiscus flowers
- Nasturtium flowers
- Pansies and violas

Fresh weeds should make up the majority of their diet wherever possible. You can collect suitable weeds from areas that are free from pesticides, chemicals, animal faeces and pollution.

If weeds are difficult to source, lamb's lettuce, romaine lettuce and suitable supermarket salad mixes can be used occasionally as alternatives.

Feeding guidelines

- Offer a varied selection of fresh food.
- As a general guide, offer an amount approximately the size of your tortoise's shell.
- Avoid overfeeding. Slow, steady growth is much healthier than rapid growth.
- Outdoor enclosures planted with safe edible weeds provide excellent natural grazing and enrichment.

Foods to avoid

Fruit should ideally be avoided, as its high sugar content is unsuitable for regular tortoise feeding.

Never feed poisonous plants or unsuitable foods, including:

- Ivy
- Foxglove
- Buttercups
- Daffodils and anything grown from a bulb
- Rhubarb
- Holly
- Yew
- Azalea and rhododendron
- Hydrangea
- Avocado
- Citrus fruits

There are many other plants that are unsuitable for tortoises.

We recommend downloading the **Tortoise Table app** to check whether plants are safe before feeding them.

Calcium & supplements

Calcium is essential for healthy shell development, strong bones and the prevention of metabolic bone disease.

- Use an appropriate calcium supplement as advised by your reptile vet.
- Provide a suitable cuttlefish bone within the enclosure.
- Ensure your tortoise receives adequate UVB lighting to support vitamin D3 production and calcium absorption.

---

2. HEATING & LIGHTING

Correct heating and UV lighting are among the most important parts of tortoise care.

Tortoises are cold-blooded reptiles and rely on their environment to regulate their body temperature.

They require access to both heat and UVB lighting to support normal growth, healthy shell development, digestion and natural behaviour.

Recommended temperatures

Area	Temperature
Basking area	30–32°C
Cooler end	20–22°C
Night-time	Around 18–20°C

Your tortoise must always be able to move between warmer and cooler areas to regulate its own temperature.

Lighting requirements

We recommend:

- A 12% T5 UVB strip light.
- A separate basking heat bulb.
- A suitable fitting for each light.

A combined mercury vapour lamp is another option, although we generally recommend a separate T5 UV system.

Important lighting advice:

- Keep UVB and basking lights on for approximately 12 hours each day.
- Switch lights off at night.
- Position UVB lighting approximately 15–24 inches above the tortoise, subject to the manufacturer's guidance and the bulb's reflector.
- Replace UVB bulbs in accordance with the manufacturer's recommended schedule.

A UVB bulb may continue to produce visible light even when its UV output has reduced significantly.

---

3. HOUSING & ENCLOSURES

Your tortoise requires suitable indoor and outdoor accommodation.

Even during the summer, UK weather can be unpredictable, so an appropriate indoor enclosure is essential.

Indoor housing

A tortoise table is an excellent option, providing good ventilation and enough space for your tortoise to explore.

For a baby tortoise, we recommend a minimum starting size of 100cm x 50cm, with larger accommodation as it grows.

Your enclosure should include:

- A suitable basking area.
- A cooler area.
- A secure hide.
- Suitable substrate.

- Fresh drinking water.
- Feeding areas.
- Plants and enrichment.

Substrate

We recommend an organic topsoil and coco coir mixture.

Alternatively, suitable organic topsoil can be used with an appropriate sand mixture.

The substrate should retain some moisture without becoming waterlogged. Avoid excessively dry, dusty conditions, particularly for young tortoises.

A waterproof liner should be used to protect wooden enclosures from moisture damage.

Different substrate areas can provide additional enrichment and encourage natural behaviours such as digging and exploring.

Outdoor housing

Outdoor access is extremely beneficial when weather conditions are suitable.

A good outdoor enclosure should:

- Be secure and escape-proof.
- Have solid sides to prevent climbing out.
- Include a secure mesh cover to protect against predators.
- Provide sunny and shaded areas.
- Include safe edible plants for grazing.
- Provide suitable areas for digging and shelter.
- Always have access to fresh drinking water.

Never leave a tortoise outside in unsuitable temperatures or without adequate protection.

---

4. BATHING & HYDRATION

Fresh drinking water must always be available.

Although tortoises obtain some moisture from their food, regular access to water and appropriate bathing are important for hydration.

Bathing routine

When your tortoise first arrives home, we recommend a shallow, lukewarm bath daily during the initial settling-in period.

Thereafter, bathing approximately once or twice weekly may be appropriate, depending on age, hydration, diet and individual needs.

How to bathe your tortoise:

1. Use a shallow container with lukewarm water.
2. Ensure the water is shallow enough for your tortoise to stand comfortably and lift its head above the surface.
3. Allow approximately 5–10 minutes of soaking.
4. Never leave your tortoise unattended.
5. Gently dry your tortoise before returning it to its enclosure.

Your tortoise may drink during bathing and may also pass waste. This is completely normal.

Always refresh drinking water and clean the bathing container after use.

---

5. SPECIES INFORMATION

Horsfield's Tortoise

Also known as the Russian tortoise, this species originates from Central Asia.

- Average adult size: 13–20cm (5–8 inches).
- Generally a smaller tortoise species.
- Known for being hardy and active.
- A naturally hibernating species.

Hermann's Tortoise

Originating from Southern Europe, Hermann's tortoises are one of the most popular species kept in the UK.

- Average adult size: 18–25cm (7–10 inches).
- Small to medium-sized species.
- Requires appropriate UVB lighting.
- A naturally hibernating species.

Spur-thighed (Greek) Tortoise

A Mediterranean species originating from areas of Southern Europe and surrounding regions.

- Average adult size: 20–25cm (8–10 inches).
- Medium-sized tortoise.
- Known for its long lifespan.
- A naturally hibernating species.

Marginated Tortoise

Originating from Southern Greece, Italy and surrounding regions, the Marginated tortoise is the largest of the European tortoise species covered in this guide.

- Average adult size: 31–38cm (12–15 inches).
- Requires plenty of space as it grows.
- Enjoys rocky and varied terrain.
- A naturally hibernating species.

Hibernation

The species listed above are naturally hibernating tortoises.

However, hibernation should never be attempted without proper preparation, health assessment and suitable facilities.

We recommend discussing hibernation with a qualified reptile vet before making any decisions, particularly for young tortoises.

Never assume that a tortoise is healthy enough to hibernate simply because it belongs to a hibernating species.

---

6. YOUR NEW TORTOISE – SETTLING IN

Moving into a new home can be stressful for a young tortoise.

To help your tortoise settle:

- Have its enclosure, heating and lighting fully prepared before arrival.
- Provide a shallow lukewarm bath.
- Offer fresh weeds and suitable food.
- Allow your tortoise time to explore its new surroundings.
- Avoid excessive handling during the first few days.
- Monitor appetite, activity and general behaviour.
- Check temperatures daily.

It is normal for a tortoise to take a little time to become comfortable in a new environment.

If your tortoise is persistently refusing food, appears lethargic, has discharge from its nose or eyes, or shows any other signs of illness, contact a qualified reptile vet promptly.

---

7. ESSENTIAL SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Before bringing your tortoise home, make sure you have everything ready.

☐ Suitable tortoise table or enclosure
☐ 12% T5 UVB lighting
☐ Basking heat bulb
☐ Suitable light fittings
☐ Soil substrate
☐ Hides and décor eg live plants
☐ Calcium/multivitamin supplement
☐ Water dish
☐ Food dish
☐ Thermometer
☐ Cuttlefish bone

☐ Secure outdoor enclosure
☐ Fresh suitable weeds

---

8. IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Tortoises can live for 50 years or more.
- Always provide suitable UVB lighting and heat.
- Feed a varied diet of safe weeds, flowers and greens.
- Fresh drinking water must always be available.
- Provide both indoor and outdoor accommodation.
- Keep a close eye on temperatures.
- Never attempt hibernation without appropriate professional guidance.
- Contact a reptile vet if you have concerns about your tortoise's health.

---

9. WE ARE HERE TO HELP!

We believe that responsible tortoise ownership starts with good advice and continues throughout your tortoise's life.

If you have any questions about feeding, housing, heating, lighting or general care, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

We are always happy to offer help and guidance.

Thank you for choosing us, and we wish you many happy years with your new tortoise!

Useful resources:

- Tortoise Table: www.thetortoisetable.org.uk
- Exotic Direct: www.exoticdirect.co.uk
- Our website: www.tortoisehut.co.uk
- Tortoise Trust: www.tortoisetrust.com

Please remember that this guide provides general husbandry information. Individual tortoises may have different requirements depending on their species, age and health. We recommend establishing a relationship with a qualified reptile veterinary practice.