

# THE TORTOISE HUT

## HORSFIELD & MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISE

### INFORMATION & CARE SHEET:

On average tortoises will live in excess of 50 years so it's a big decision for any family to purchase a tortoise as their new addition to the household. As a responsible pet owner, it is essential that you know all the requirements for looking after a tortoise before purchase.

We provide as much help and advice as you need before purchasing your tortoise and are here to answer any questions you may have afterwards too.

Forums and groups can be helpful and have some great information and ideas, but they can also be a very negative place too so just be aware, don't believe everything you read!

#### Diet:

Tortoises are herbivores and require a good variety of food items that are high in fibre but low in fat and protein. As a guide, feed your tortoise with an amount of food roughly the same size as its shell for each feed. Do not overfeed your tortoise. Slow and healthy growth is better!

Tortoises are a grazing reptile so planting an outdoor enclosure with feed safe weeds is ideal for foraging which is a natural source of enrichment. If your tortoise has access to this type of enclosure there is no need to offer additional feeding. You can also grow weeds inside on a windowsill and snip off food as required whilst ensuring that it is free from animal droppings and chemicals such as insecticides and exhaust fumes. It is essential to feed your tortoise a wide variety of food items.

#### **A Tortoise's diet should consist mainly of weeds, flowers and greens.**

A few examples are:

Dandelion leaves & flowers, plantain, clover, hawkweed, mallow, sow thistle, catsear, milk thistle, chickweed, hibiscus flowers, nasturtiums, pansies, violas, forget me not, deadnettle, lamb's lettuce, romaine lettuce, kale, rocket, pea shoots, Florette crispy salad.

Fruit is the equivalent of junk food for a tortoise so should be given very occasionally and make up no more than 5-10% of their diet (Strawberry, apple, pear, tomato, melon, plum, apricot). Ideally fruit should be avoided all together!

#### ***Poisonous foods to avoid feeding your tortoise –***

*Avocado, Hellebores, Narcissus, Azalea, Crocus, Mistletoe, Lupins, Rhubarb, Hemlock, Peony, Holly, Aubergine, Chilli peppers, Potato, Vinca, Calla Lily, Bleeding Heart, Hypericum, Tiger Lily, Foxglove, Hydrangea, Buttercup, Yew, Lobelia Aconite, Horse Chestnut, Daffodils, Ragwort, Rhododendron, Rosemary, Elderflower, Ivy, Hyacinth, Venus Flytrap, Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, Bean sprouts, Citrus fruits, Iris, Morning glory.*

Calcium is an essential part of the tortoise's diet and is vital for even shell growth, to help prevent metabolic bone disease and for general good health and wellbeing. A calcium & multivitamin supplement can be used on food, such as Nutrical or Superveggie. A combination of calcium used alongside your UVB bulb will aid your tortoise in essential vitamin D3 synthesis.

Cuttlefish bone are also a good source of calcium and can be left within the enclosure for your tortoise to nibble on at their leisure. This natural behaviour also ensures that your tortoises' beak does not become overgrown.

Before your tortoise starts to explore outside, please check that there is no poisonous vegetation within reach. Your tortoise may occasionally eat insects, worms and snails when exploring outside, this is natural behaviour. If your tortoise spends time outside, we advise that you use a good quality tortoise wormer regularly (approximately every 4 months) such as Kusuri Tortoise Wormer Plus or Verm X reptile wormer.

All tortoise's carry their own complement of parasitic worms regardless of how healthy they are, worms are a fact of life for tortoises! When they are in good health, these worms do not cause any issue to your tortoise but as soon as the tortoise is stressed or hibernating, its natural immunity is compromised and internal parasites can take hold.

## **Heating and Lighting**

It is essential that your tortoise has a full spectrum light that produces UVB and UVA. UVB allows the tortoise to synthesise vitamin D3 helping to prevent or reverse metabolic bone disease and ensure normal shell growth, promoting long health. UVA increases feeding, mating and other natural behaviours. These are all fundamental to the normal development and health of basking reptiles such as tortoises.

You can use an ultraviolet strip light and a separate basking bulb or a combined mercury vapour basking lamp which provides both heat and UVA/UVB. Both the heat and UV (or single combination bulb) should be switched on for approximately 12 hours each day, this can be plugged into a timer and set appropriately. When your tortoise spends time outside during spring and summer, the sun provides the natural ultraviolet light required.

Ensure that one end of the tortoise housing is heated to around 30°C and the other end is cooler at around 20°C allowing your tortoise to choose its preferred temperature. Basking lamps should be kept at least 6 inches above the basking area, we recommend around 10 inches. The night-time temperature may drop to around 18-20°C, this is fine as it would naturally do this in an outdoor environment.

Please always follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines on the installation and lifetime guarantee of any lighting unit/bulb you are using. It is important to remember to change the UV bulb as stated on the packaging. The bulb may still be working but not necessarily producing any UV.

## **Housing, Décor and Substrates**

Make sure you understand the basic needs of a tortoise regarding temperature and housing. They need suitable indoor and outdoor enclosures.

All tortoise's regardless of their size and age must have a suitable indoor enclosure such as a tortoise table or vivarium with suitable heating and lighting, as the UK weather and temperature tends to fluctuate and is not stable enough to maintain your tortoise outside throughout the summer.

Remember tortoises are cold blooded and need stable temperatures to maintain a healthy appetite and growth.

Humidity should be kept low to moderate as a higher humidity level can cause respiratory issues. A hide or plant pot with sphagnum moss inside is ideal to provide local humidity.

We recommend using a coco coir substrate but alternatively you can use a sterilised topsoil/sand mix but ensure this doesn't become too dry in the heated enclosure as this can cause issues with

your tortoises' eyes and respiratory infections especially on smaller hatchlings. We find that the hemp substrate or straw pellet works well for hatchlings. If you choose to use coco coir or soil substrate please remember to line your enclosure with a waterproof protector to prevent your enclosure from rotting. To encourage natural behaviour and provide enrichment you can have several areas of varying substrates for your tortoise to discover.

Outdoor enclosures should be available to your tortoise whenever the weather is suitably warm, the larger the space the better. This enclosure should be secure and escape proof, allow access to the sun and allow for sufficient air flow. All outdoor enclosures must be safe from predators such as foxes and large birds, so a mesh lid is essential for their protection.

A variety of plants can be grown within the enclosure to encourage natural foraging, secured rocks or slate for a shelter and a soil and sand area for digging. Water should always be accessible within the outdoor enclosure.

## **Bathing**

Although tortoises will drink little water when fed a mixed moist diet, there should always be fresh drinking water available daily. Tortoises require a shallow warm bath approximately 1-2 times a week. When purchasing a tortoise, we recommend that you bath them every day for the first week or two to discourage any stress and encourage active behaviour within the new environment.

The benefits of this are to help aid digestion, waste management and to ensure they are fully hydrated. Use a Tupperware or litter tray with enough luke-warm water to allow your tortoise to place its head under the water but not too deep that it cannot lift its head above the water. A soft toothbrush or cotton wool ball can be used to gently clean the shell. Tortoises will drink by submerging both their mouth and nose, even up to their necks. Ensure you check the temperature of the water before placing your tortoise in the bath.

Allow approximately 5-10 minutes soak in the bath, this should be enough time to ensure your tortoise is fully hydrated and that the water doesn't get cold. Your tortoise may empty its bowels in the bath or water bowl which is normal as they also absorb water through the vent in their tails. Drinking water should be refreshed as soon as possible and the bathing water changed.

## **Species information:**

### **HORSFIELD TORTOISE:**

The Horsfield's tortoise originates from Central Asia and is also known as the Russian tortoise. They are a hibernating species, however we don't recommend doing this until they are nearer 5 years of age. It is one of the more commonly kept species of tortoise due to their smaller size and are fairly hardy compared to some of the more tropical breeds of tortoise.

On average an adult Horsfield's tortoise will grow to approximately 5-8 inches (13-20cms) with a growth rate of around 1 inch per year. However, this may vary in individuals.

This species is listed as a CITES Annex B species and does not require an Article 10 CITES certificate to be legally sold.

### **MEDITERRANEAN SPUR THIGH TORTOISE:**

The Greek tortoise is more commonly known as the Spur-thighed tortoise and is one of the Mediterranean species of tortoise. They are a hibernating species, however we don't recommend doing this until they are nearer 5 years of age. It is a more commonly kept species of tortoise within the UK. Spur-thighed tortoises are within the medium sized family of tortoise breeds and are renowned for their extensive lifespan. High UV lighting is required and low humidity.

On average, an adult Spur-thighed tortoise will grow to approximately 8-10 inches (20-25cms). However, this may vary in individuals.

This species is listed as a CITES Annex A species and does require an Article 10 CITES certificate to be legally sold.

**MARGINATED TORTOISE:**

The Marginated tortoise originates from Southern Greece, Italy and North-eastern Sardinia. They are a hibernating species, however we don't recommend doing this until they are nearer 5 years of age. The Marginated tortoise is the largest of the European tortoises and prefers a more mountainous, rocky terrain than the other breeds. High UV lighting is required and low to moderate humidity.

On average the Marginated tortoise will grow to approximately 12-15 inches (31-38cms). However, this may vary in individuals.

This species is listed as a CITES Annex A species and does require an Article 10 CITES certificate to be legally sold.

**HERMANNS TORTOISE:**

The Hermann's tortoise originates from Southern Europe, from Spain to Turkey. They are a hibernating species, however we don't recommend doing this until they are nearer 5 years of age. It is one of the most popular and more commonly kept species of tortoise within the UK. Hermann's are within the small to medium sized family of tortoise breeds. High UV lighting is required and low humidity.

On average, an adult Hermann's tortoise will grow to approximately 7-10 inches (18-25cms). However, this may vary in individuals.

This species is listed as a CITES Annex A species and does require an Article 10 CITES certificate to be legally sold.

**Shopping list – the essentials:**

- Tortoise table or vivarium
- UV lighting
- Heat bulb
- Light fitting
- Substrate
- Hides
- Décor
- Supplements
- Water dish
- Food dish
- Thermometer
- Cuttlefish
- Secure outdoor enclosure
- Fresh food

