**Box Turtle Care Sheet**

When you pick the turtle up use two hands, supporting the body…don’t leave it dangling. The turtle should feel heavy - not like a lightweight empty shell. The eyes and nose of the turtle should be clear. Not runny or bubbly.. You should give a gentle pull on a back leg and it should cause the turtle to pull back with some strength. Check for swelling around the limbs of the turtle. If the skin looks puffy it is not healthy. The shell should be firm with no soft areas. The upper lip (or beak) should not be hanging over the lower beak and it should be free of breaks.

 Habitat

Enclosure

Indoor habitats for an adult box turtle should be 50 gallons or more. Turtles are very active and do much better in outdoor habitats…but can be healthy indoor if given enough room. Enclosures can be glass, acrylic, or Plexiglas tanks, plastic tubs, or wood.

Substrate

You can line the bottom of the enclosure with organic potting soil, bed-a beast coconut fiber, or even paper bags. Turtles prefer to dig and burrow so dirt is best. No sand, gravel, vermiculite or yard dirt should be used. Turtle often digest their substrate and all those things would be damaging to the digestive systems. Turtles need a cave to hide in. This can be a fancy rock looking cave or log looking cave from the pet store, or it can be a box or Tupperware with the side cut out. They wont care as long as they have a sheltered place to sleep.

Water

Turtles need to soak in water regularly. A large shallow dish must be placed in the habitat so the turtle can easily climb in and out and drink and soak. The turtle will often use the bath to defecate (go potty). It should be emptied and refilled daily.

Heat

The enclosure should be kept at 85 degrees on one end and 70-75 on the other. A temperature gradient is important so the turtle can control its body temperature. There are several heat options available. Ceramic heating elements can be used by clamping the hood to the top of the enclosure. These units create heat without light so they can be used day or night. Infra-red bulbs can also be used over the enclosure day or night. Heat pads can be stuck to the outside of glass enclosures but only on the sides. Do NOT use underneath as the turtle can burn itself when burrowing. NEVER EVER use heat rocks. So many animals come into the rescue burned because of faulty heat rocks. Animals can be burned or electrocuted with heating units inside the habitat. The nighttime temperature should be around 70 degrees.

Lighting

Turtles must have UVB lighting. Many pet stores will sell bulbs that say they are “daytime” bulbs, or artificial “sun” lights, or even “full spectrum” lighting. None of these bulbs are adequate. The bulb must say that it produces UVA and UVB lighting to keep the turtle healthy. Turtles must have UVB rays (which mimic the natural sun) in order to metabolize calcium and vitamin D. Without the UV, they will not grow properly, and their bones can become soft or brittle and break easily without you knowing. These bulbs can be purchased as light only to be used in conjunction with the heat source of your choice, or with a heat producing element so only one fixture is needed. The light will work for a few years if not broken, but the UVB will wear out and therefore these bulbs must be replaced every 12-18 months. They are available for purchase on line and in most pet stores. Note that the UV waves cannot pass through glass, and 40% of the available waves are lost when the light passes through an aluminum screen; try to have the light shining directly on them.

**FOOD**Turtles need to be warm to properly digest their food. It is best to offer food after their light has been on for an hour or more. It is also important to not offer food before the heat turns off at the end of the day so the turtle does not sleep with undigested food in its tummy. Turtles are omnivores and should be offered plants and meat.

**Plant Matter.**Turtles should be offered a variety of fruits and vegetables. They should get offered a good amount of dark leafy greens such as collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, kale, etc. They should NEVER be fed iceberg or other light colored lettuce. There are enzymes in lettuce that can be harmful to a turtles digestive system. They can have other vegetables, and small amounts of fruit.

**Meat**Turtles should be offered some form of “meat” with their meals. This can be offered in many forms. Insects and bugs are the most common natural meat source for turtles. They can eat worms, slugs, snails, mealworms, phoenix worms, crickets, etc. The key to a healthy diet is fresh food and variety. Make sure to offer different types fruits, veggies, and bugs.

Supplements

Turtles need to have calcium and vitamins added to their food twice a week. You can purchase these powdered formulas on line or at most pet stores. Sprinkle lightly over food. Turtles benefit greatly from having Vitamin A drops for their eyes. This is sold at petstores. They should be dripped into the turtles eyes once a month…or more often if the turtle is kept in a dusty environment.

Health

Turtles can be affected by a variety of health issues. They can have eye infections, respiratory infections, digestive issues, bacterial infections, parasites, etc. If your turtle shows any sign of illness (lethargic behavior, runny nose, lack of appetite, or any abnormal behavior) please call us right away so we can help you figure out what to do. Don’t wait. They can go down hill very fast.

NEVER use paint, soap, or oils on a turtle shell. Their shells are actually their ribs and spinal columns fused together. The shell is bone and is connected to their bodies. The shell is covered with chitin. This is a biological porous material similar to our own fingernails. It has microscopic holes that allow air to transfer to their bodies. Covering the shell with oils or paints will block these holes and stop air from circulating. The UV rays they absorb from the sun will also be blocked. They will not be able to develop, grow, or maintain proper health. No cleaners should ever be used other than room temperature water. If necessary you can use a soft toothbrush to scrub the shell, but never use sandpaper or abrasive scrubbers as this can hurt the tortoise and the protective layer of the shell.

If you have questions or concerns please call Creepy Critters Rescue (408)561-9561