SULCATA CARE SHEET

HABITATS

Hatchlings may be maintained indoors in aquariums. After 4 to 6 years the tortoise will most likely be too large to live indoors anymore. A secure pen must be created outdoors at this time. The tortoises can move object up to 4 times their body weight, so make it sturdy. They will need to have a place to escape the sun. Dog igloos are very popular for this. In the winter the tortoise will need the enclosure to be heated using ceramic units suspended from the roof of the dog-loo, or using a farm heating blanket under the house. (These are often called pig blankets).

HEATING

Half the indoor enclosure should be placed on a heating pad, or a ceramic heater should be placed over the top of the cage enabling the hatchling to thermoregulate (temperature control) itself. The warm side of the enclosure should not range above 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and the cool side no colder than 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Many websites will tell you to provide a hotter basking spot, however, in the wild hatchlings will stay in burrows during the hottest time of the day, so hotter in a tank is not healthy.

LIGHTING

To provide the necessary ultraviolet B exposure, hatchlings kept inside must be given 10-12 hours a day exposure to UVB-producing fluorescent light. These can be purchased at most pet stores. The bulb must state on the package that it is a UVB producing bulb of 5.0 or higher. Fluorescent lighting does not produce UV. An outdoor pen can be constructed to provide natural UVB from the sun. It must have a screen or wire lid to prevent predators from eating the tortoise. If using natural sun the exposure can be dropped to 4 to 6 hours a day. Adults do not need lids on their enclosures.

FOOD

Food should be offered every other day, with any leftovers removed from the enclosure. Hatchlings can be offered dark greens such as collard greens, mustard greens, pesticide free weeds (dandelions, orchard grass, etc.). Juveniles and adults should be offered less greens and more dried food sources such as hay. Alfalfa hay should NOT be given to tortoises. It is too high in protein and can cause health problems. Bermuda Hay, Orchard grass hay, Fescue Hay, and Timothy hay are all good for the tortoise to live on. You will be tempted to give your tortoise yummy looking fruits and vegetables, but please only do this occasionally as a treat. In the wild the tortoise cannot find such lush food items in their desert habitats. They can be given squash (pumpkins, butternut, spaghetti squash) once a week, but will not need it. They are designed to digest and survive on dried grasses, and the occasional Noplales (prickly pear) cactus.

NO animal protein (such as insects or meat) should be offered at any time. These types of foods may cause growth abnormalities and health problems. In the wild the only time a tortoise will ingest any type of animal protein is when an insect might be on a plant they are eating.

SUPPLEMENTS

Hatchlings should have their food sprinkled with a vitamin and calcium with D3 powder twice a week. This is extremely important for healthy growth of their bones and shell. These supplements can be purchased at most pet stores in the reptiles section. Cuttle bone found in the bird section of most pet stores can also be used for calcium. It is too dense for the hatchlings but great to throw into the larger Sulcata enclosures.

WATER

Twice weekly, hatchlings housed in enclosures should be bathed in shallow tepid water. Short, fifteen minute soaks helps to stimulate elimination. The water should be no deeper than their bottom carapace (shell). If too deep they can drown.

There should always be a shallow dish in the enclosure (whether indoors or outside) for the tortoise to be able to climb in and drink or soak. This should be cleaned daily.

Adults should have shallow ( 1 foot deep or less) water that they can get into. It helps to dig it inot the ground so they can walk in and out easily.

**Health**

It is important that the keeper gets to know the normal behavior of his/her tortoise because behavioral changes are often the first sign of illness. Tortoises are susceptible to respiratory ailments, such as the [Upper Respiratory Tract Disease](http://www.tortoise.org/general/urds.html) . Warning signs are a runny or bubbly nose, loss of appetite, and gasping. Respiratory disease symptoms can often be cleared if treatment is begun immediately, however, there is no "cure" for URTD. For swollen eyes, wounds or injuries contact a veterinarian immediately. Swollen and sunken eyes are often mis-diagnosed as vitamin A deficiency when it is in fact a dehydration or respiratory illness issue. NEVER allow a veterinarian to inject vitamin A if a tortoise is grazing on grasses/weeds and eating a healthy green diet. Sick or wounded tortoises MUST be moved inside away from flies. Worms and other parasites are sometimes a problem in tortoises. Symptoms such as loss of weight, and lack of energy for no apparent reason are an indication can be indicative of parasite overload and a fecal exam should be done by a qualified tortoise veterinarian. DO NOT allow a vet to give your tortoise Albendazole or Ivermectin as they can cause more serious health issues or even death.

NEVER use paint, soap, or oils on a tortoise 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 any questions or concerns, Please do not hesitate to contact us using the contact form on the website. www.creepycrittersrescue.com