**Bearded Dragon Care**

**Preparing its home**

One of the important bearded dragon care sheet instructions to keep in mind is to prepare a suitable environment for the reptile. The size of the tank you get will depend on the size of the bearded dragon. The minimum size tank you get should be at least 20 gallons for a small / young beardie. If you can get a larger tank, that would be better as this will give your beardie more room to move about. A larger adult will require a larger tank, at least 40 gallons for ample room for a basking spot, a cool area and space to move. If you have more than one beardie, a larger tank becomes necessary.

There should be a screen lid on top with a bulb directed in the tank to provide much needed warmth. Plexiglass covers are not recommended because you want to have ample air flow and circulation. If the tank gets enclosed, it will get too humid inside. The most important light source needed is a UVB bulb. Dragons need the same UV rays that come from the sun. They use the UV to metabolize calcium and regulate growth and digestion. Without this lighting, the dragon will not grow properly, or maintain a long healthy life. This lighting can be purchased at most pet stores. The box should read 5.0 or 8.0. The bulb will not burn out for a long time, however, the UV will fade gradually and be gone within 18 months. It will be important to mark the date of purchase and remember to replace it every 18 months.

The tank of your bearded dragon should have both a warm side and a cool side. For warmth, a regular bulb will do. You can also use a reptile basking light. Be sure to provide 110 degrees F for the basking spot. If you have an adult bearded dragon, lower the temperature to 95 degrees F. The cool side of the tank should be at 85 degrees F. During evenings, the temperature can be lowered down to 65 degrees. It’s best to have a thermometer on both sides to be able to monitor the temperature in the tank at all times.

The tank should also be filled with substrate. You can use paper towels, old newspapers or even reptile carpet. Sand, wood shavings and other loose materials aren’t recommended for young bearded dragons since they may ingest the material and cause digestive problems. Crushed walnut shells are also not recommended for both young and adult reptiles.

Also, give your bearded dragon some place to play in the tank. These lizards love to climb, so place elevated areas for climbing. Rocks and some branches are ideal. Half logs and even an overturned pot are suitable.

**Feeding time**

Your beardie’s diet will play a huge role in the overall health of your reptile. Your bearded dragon will be easy to feed. After all, they are omnivorous, which means that they eat both animals and plants. Small insects such as crickets and cockroaches are a popular choice. Keep the portions small. A good rule of thumb is to make sure that the item you give your beardie is no larger than the space between the reptile’s eyes. Make sure to remove the uneaten portions as soon as the reptile is done to keep the tank clean.

You can try to feed your beardie once or twice a day and keep offering until the reptile stops eating. On average, most beardies will eat about 20 crickets a day. Some may even up to 60 crickets or insects a day as they grow. Also, be sure to feed your beardie insects from the pet store and not insects that you have randomly caught. This way, you can be assured of the quality of the insects. Backyard insects may have been exposed to fertilizers and other toxic substances that can be detrimental to your reptile’s health when consumed. These may even carry parasites. Some insects such as lighting bugs can kill reptiles. As your bearded dragon gets older, you can introduce treats such as earthworms and other types of worms on an occasional basis.

When it comes to plant based food items, give your bearded dragon green leafy items such as collard greens, mustard greens, or dandelion greens. These should be given raw. The leafy vegetables also serve as a water source for your bearded dragon. Avoid giving your bearded dragon too many carrots and never feed it spinach or lettuce. Although spinach is loaded with calcium, it can be indigestible for your reptile, resulting in compaction and other digestive issues.

Fruits can also be occasionally given, but avoid citrus based fruits such as lemons and oranges. Mango, papaya and berries are some of the fruits that can be tolerated by a bearded dragon.

**Vitamins**

To boost the nutritional value of these food items, sprinkle it with some multivitamin supplement or calcium supplement. Bearded dragons will live longer and stay healthier when given multivitamin supplements. These can be purchased at pet stores and are specially designed for reptile consumption. The multivitamin supplements can be dusted on the reptile’s food about twice a week.

**Water**

All living things require water and this is true even for a heat loving reptile. Make sure a dish of water is present at all times. Clean it often as they will occasionally use it as a bathroom. Keep a spray bottle filled with water. This provides a nice mist that can be quite soothing and enjoyable for your bearded dragon. The bearded dragon should be sprayed daily to help keep it cool and to give it much needed water to drink.

**Hygiene**

The feces in your beardie’s tank need to be removed on the daily basis. This is also true for any uneaten insects. Use a small cup to scoop it out. On a daily basis, the food and water bowl of your reptile should be emptied and cleaned.

Also, your reptile’s tank should be cleaned every few months. This includes changing the substrate. When cleaning the tank, remove the bearded dragon and wash down the tank with warm soapy water. Sanitize the tank with a mixture of bleach or and water. Use a capful of bleach for a bucket of water. This should be enough to kill any bacteria that may harm your beardie. Leave the sanitizing or disinfecting product on the tank and other items for at least 15 minutes before rinsing thoroughly. There should be no bleach smell. If there is, simply keep rinsing and drying the tank. Dry the tank thoroughly before returning the beardie and filling it up again with substrate and other accessories. All accessories such as rocks or pots should also be washed and disinfected before being returned to the clean tank. Use new substrate after cleaning the tank.

You should also wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling your beardie. It’s important to have clean hands before you touch your reptile so you don’t pass on any germs or bacteria to your pet. At the same time, keep in mind that reptiles do have some salmonella present, so for your own health, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water after touching your beardie or handling the tank and its other accessories.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Creepy Critters Rescue at any time.

Thank You. Enjoy your new pet!

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