**I Wanna Iguana**

*Iguanas:* Iguanas are originally from South America and Mexico. They have been a popular reptile in the pet trade for many years now. Unfortunately they are not easy to care for any they grow much larger than most people realize, so most Iguanas do not get to live Happily Ever After. Iguanas start out a few inches long and grow to be an average of 5 feet and length though some make it to 6 feet. They can live up to 25 years if they are cared for properly. They need constant attention and must have a patient family who is willing to build a trusting relationship with them. If you do not commit to interacting with them daily, they can become aggressive. They whip with their long tails, scratch with their sharp claws, and can bite with their serrated teeth. It can be too much to deal with once they reach 3 feet or more, but impossible to deal with once they are full grown. Make sure you are ready for this commitment before taking an Iguana as a pet. If you can give them your time and attention, they can be one of the most rewarding reptiles to own. They attach to their humans much like a cat does. Most reptiles do not develop emotional attachments the way Iguanas do. They can become docile and look for affection. They learn their names and know your voice. If you are patient, and give them love, they will return the favor.

*Habitat:* Iguanas are very active lizards. They spend a lot of time in trees, climbing and exploring. They need tall habitats that encourage this natural behavior. They do need space that allows for the full extension of their long tails as well. As hatchlings, Iguanas can live in a 2 feet wide enclosure. This will not last long as they grow fairly quickly. They will need their home to grow as they do. As yearlings 4 feet will work. As juveniles they will need 5 feet or more. A full grown adult Iguana should not be kept in a habitat that is any less than 6 feet tall and 6 feet wide. This is the absolute minimum space that will work if you allow your Iguana to come out and roam around and explore. Some people let the Adult Iguanas have a bedroom, or even free roam the house. Iguanas cannot survive our winters, so they must have a very well heated house if they are to be kept in outdoor enclosures.

*Furnishings:* Iguanas are climbers. They need to have tall, sturdy branches throughout their habitat. They need lots of fake plants (they will eat and shred real ones) in their homes to climb on, explore, and hide in. Iguanas are intelligent and curious, so it is important to provide an enriching environment for them. Caves to hide in, rocks to climb on, and vines to swing from are all good editions to the environment.

*Lighting:* Iguanas spend all day in the sun soaking up the heat and UV rays. They must be provided with special light that simulates the sun’s rays. These special UVB bulbs can be purchased on line or in most pet stores. The lights need to be placed over the top of the habitat and shine in on the Iggy. The light needs to be on 12 hours a day. The bulbs will stay lit for long periods of time but the UV strength diminishes. You must look up the UV life of the type of bulb you are using and make sure to write the date down. If you do not keep the UV strong, the Iguana won’t be able to metabolize the calcium it needs. This will lead to a condition called MBD or metabolic bone disease. It is a painful condition that causes the bones to bend and break. Providing and replacing the UVB producing bulb is the most important thing you can do for your Iguana.

*Heat:* Iguanas need to have a good temperature gradient in their habitat. This means that wherever they live needs to be large enough to offer a hot side and a cold side. They must control their body temperatures from outside sources. There should be a heat source on one side of the habitat near a branch or shelf that they can lay on to soak up the heat and the UV. Some UV lights will produce heat as well. This is great for the winter but sometimes gets too hot in the summer. Using Ceramic Heat Emitters (produces heat without light) can be a good way to provide heat that can stay on all day if needed. Whatever heat source you choose, you will need to make sure they have a spot in the habitat that reaches about 100 degrees. The cool side of the habitat should be around 80 degrees. This is very important because they will develop problems if they are too hot for too long, or too cold for too long. They know how to keep their bodies at the right temperature as long as you provide the right sources.

*Water:* Iguanas come from places with a lot of humidity (moisture) in the air. They need you to create that moisture in their environment. There should always be a large water dish big enough for the Iguana to fit its whole body into. In nature a lot of their water intake comes from the rain. They catch the drips in their mouths or drink it by licking it off leaves and branches. You can simulate this by providing a dripper on top of the habitat that drips water into the bowl. Make sure you measure the water so it doesn’t overflow. You should also spray the habitat and its furnishings daily with water.

*Food:* Iguanas are vegetarians. They should only be fed plants. Feeding a variety of fresh foods that replicate what they can find in nature is the best way to keep them healthy. Dark leafy greens should make up the majority of the diet. Collard Greens, Mustard Greens, Kale, Dandelion Greens, Mulberry leaves are all good choices as staples for Iguana diets. They should NEVER be fed light colored lettuces such as iceberg and romaine. These lettuces contain an enzyme that slows down the Iguanas digestion blocking absorption of important nutrients. They need a variety of fruits and vegetables in their diet as well. They should be fed a variety of squashes, berries, bananas, melons, carrots, green beans, and more. Seeds and pits should be removed from all fruit except berries. Citrus fruits should be fed very sparingly. Feeding a large variety keeps your Iguana interested and healthy.

*Supplements:* Iguanas need calcium in their diets. In the wild they pick up minerals on the foods they eat. In captivity you must provide the calcium for the Iggy. Powdered calcium supplements can be found in any pet store or on line. Sprinkle onto the Iggy’s food twice a week.

*Cohabitating:* Iguanas can live in groups if they are all female and provided with enough room to get away from each other if needed. You can house a male with the females, but he will mate and it is very aggressive. The females often get hurt. The females will lay eggs which can be complicated and cause all kinds of health issues. We do not recommend keeping a male with a female. Males who are put together will fight and hurt each other, sometimes fatally. If two male Iguanas are raised together from hatchlings, then there is a chance that they will be fine together their whole lives provided they have enough room and no females are ever introduced. This is not guaranteed, so be prepared to have to separate as they grow if you own more than one.

*Puberty:* Iguanas go through a stage that is similar to puberty when they reach around 3 years old. It is much more common in males but can happen with females. They will begin testing you. They will posture at you and show some signs of aggression. It is important to continue your interaction with them at this time. You must not let them bully you from being around their habitat. They will want to become territorial. You must continue to interact with them, but do so cautiously. If you see these behaviors, be smart and wear gloves or have a towel as a shield when cleaning out their habitat. Do not stop doing what you need to or they will become more aggressive. In the wild this is when they start establishing their territory and begin looking for a mate. They will fight other Iguanas for these things. In captivity they will still feel these natural urges. You must be patient, and never show aggression, or you will lose your relationship with them. There are many things you can do to help yourself and your Iguana get through this time. If you do, you will be rewarded with a lifelong dedicated companion. Please reach out to us at this time for helpful suggestions and tricks. Most of the Iguanas that come through our rescue are because people give up on them at this time.

If you have any questions or concerns that were not addressed here please feel free to reach out to Creepy Critters Rescue at any time.