

Dragons

(Bearded, Long-nose & Netted)



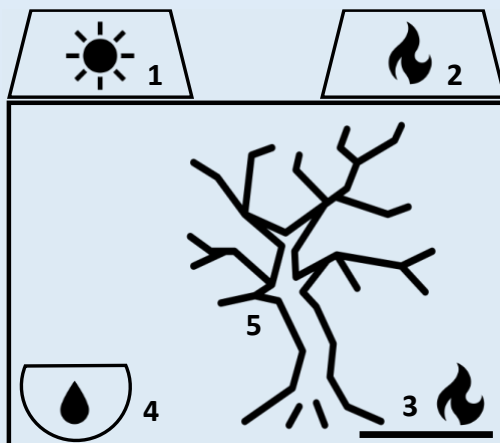
Keeping dragons is a fun and immersive experience, treasured by thousands of people across Australia. These little reptiles, affectionally known as “beardies” or “ta-tas”, are full of personality, and are a great alternative to conventional pets such as dogs and cats. Dragons are easily kept without a deep knowledge of reptile husbandry and make a wonderful pet for adults and children alike.

Housing

Enclosure Size: Enclosure size will depend on the number of dragons you intend to house; however, our advice is to house them separately. A single dragon should have enough room to run, climb and maintain a solid thermal gradient (cool end, warm end). Dragons are good climbers but will come to the ground to eat, sleep, or regulate temperature. Enclosures should ideally be taller than they are wide, but still allow room for moving around on the ground. A suitable enclosure size for a single juvenile dragon would be 45cmLx30cmDx45cmH. Enclosure size should be grown with your dragon to not overwhelm them with an oversized environment.

Enclosure materials should also be considered as they offer different traits.

- Glass: waterproof but offers no insulation against heat loss.
- MDF: keeps heat well but is not watertight.
- Custom enclosures: can be tailored to your needs but can be expensive.



Example Enclosure Setup

1. UVB Light
2. Heat lamp
3. Heat cord or mat
4. Water bowl
5. Log/plant for climbing and basking.

Temperature: Temperature for your dragon can vary depending on species, however juveniles will share the same basic needs. Enclosures should have both a “cool end” and a “warm end” that allows your dragon to choose the temperature it would like to be. Dragons enjoy a basking spot of 35-38C° and a “cool end” between 25-27°C.

Lighting/Heating: There are a few different ways to light and heat your enclosure, but we have found the most successful way is:

- Top heat via a reflector globe that is set on a timer. (10-12 hours)

- A separate UV light (we recommend Arcadia Pro T5 UVB 14%) set on a timer (10-12 hours)
- Overnight heat (as a juvenile) using either a heat mat or heat cords.

The wattage of your lights/heating will depend on the size of your enclosure and should be controlled with a thermometer/thermostat to ensure the correct temperatures are being maintained.

Substrate: There are several great substrates that can be used for dragons!

- Paper towel: easy to clean & replace.
- Fake grass: easy to clean but can smell after time if not cleaned properly.
- Kitty Litter Pellets: traps moisture/odour but may be ingested.
- Reptile safe sand: easy to clean but may be ingested.

Accessories: Keeping your dragon's enclosure simple to begin with is recommended while you get used to each other. A simple beginner enclosure will include:

- Water bowl
- Branches/logs to climb and bask on
- Rock/s to bask on
- Fake plant/s to hide in or a rock hide.

Handling

Each dragon will have a varying personality, so it's important to work with their specific needs. Handling can be done daily, and it is advised to approach your dragon from below, as grabbing them from above may startle or frighten them. Handling can be slowly introduced to avoid overwhelming them, with sessions kept gentle and calm, guided by your pet and their reactions. Dragons are quite fast, so they may need to be lightly restrained to ensure they do not jump from your hands. Pets such as dogs and cats should be out of the room while you are handling your reptile, and supervision is always recommended for young children.

See troubleshooting below for common handling problems

Feeding

Food: Dragons are omnivores and will eat a variety of bugs, fruits, and vegetables. It is important to feed your dragon different foods to ensure they're receiving the correct levels of calcium, phosphorus, vitamins, and protein. Fruit should be given sparingly as it contains a lot of hard to digest sugars.

As a juvenile, we recommend feeding smaller quantities of food more often, which can then be modified as your dragon grows. An example would be:

- 1-3 months: Feeding small amounts twice a day.

- 3-6 months: Feeding once a day.
- 6-12 months: Feeding every 2nd day.
- 12+ months: Feeding 3 times a week and backed off in the cooler months.

Water: Misting your dragon will encourage them to drink, as well as assist in humidity levels and shedding. This can be done daily as a juvenile and backed off to a few times a week as an adult. Water bowls placed in the “cool end” of the enclosure can be cleaned weekly and monitored for water loss throughout the week.

Supplements: Calcium powder helps with the development of your dragon’s bones and can be given with every few feeds* (dusted on insects). This can also reduce the likelihood of your pet eating its substrate which has been seen in dragons with low calcium levels. A small bowl of calcium can be left available in your dragon’s enclosure, as they will usually help themselves when they need to. Appropriate levels of nutrients can help reduce risk of MDB later in the life of your dragon.

***Note:** Some juvenile Long-nose Dragons are sensitive to calcium intake in their first few months, so levels need to be monitored to insure they are not receiving too much.

See Discover Deadly’s “Lizard Feeding Guide” for information on lizard safe foods

Troubleshooting

My dragon isn’t eating!

If your dragon is new, they may need a few days to settle into their environment – this can be quite a stressful time for them (and you). A few contributing factors to new or adult dragons not eating include:

- Temperature – is your enclosure at the correct heat for the species?
- Excess and/or stressful handling sessions
- Food – your dragon may want a change of diet.
- Torpor – Dragons may go into a state of inactivity for a few hours up to a few weeks at a time.
- Any changes in the household – visitors etc.
- Where enclosure is located in the home – near drafts, direct sunlight etc.

My dragon didn’t slough (shed) properly!

A juvenile dragon should be shedding regularly as they grow and gain weight fast, and a healthy adult may only shed a few times a year. Dragons do not tend to shed in one solid piece; rather lots of smaller pieces that fall off while your pet runs around in its enclosure. Ensure that your husbandry is correct (heating, humidity, access to water etc.) as this can all affect your lizard’s ability to shed correctly. Regular misting will help keep humidity levels up and allow for an easier shedding experience.

If all other attempts have not worked, seek professional advice. Do not attempt to remove large pieces of skin yourself as this can cause damage to scales and lead to further issues.

See below references for vet recommendations

It's winter and my dragon is acting different!

Your new dragon may go into a state of torpor during the cooler months. This is an involuntary behaviour that some reptiles have adapted to survive when temperatures are too low for metabolic activity (usually a body temperature below 32°C). As a juvenile, we recommend using heat 24 hours a day for the first few years of its life as this can help reduce the likelihood of your dragon entering torpor. Keep an eye on your thermometer temperatures during the cooler months, especially at night. Food can still be offered to your pet as this is not a prolonged state and will last from a few hours up to a few weeks depending on conditions.

Bites!

Your new dragon may try to bite you during handling sessions; know that this is not likely to hurt or cause any injury and is expected to happen at least once or twice during the life of your pet. There are a few possible reasons why a dragon may bite:

- Feeding– this is usually the result of the handler placing their fingers near their pet while eating or using their fingers to feed instead of tongs.
- Accidental – some animals will instinctively open their mouths when there is something pressing on their jaw.
- Defence – dragons don't like to be approached from above as it can startle them or make them think an overhead predator is nearby.
- Incorrect handling – Support your dragon from underneath using a flat, open palm. Your thumb can be used gently to apply pressure on their back to stop excess wiggling and/or jumping.

I've lost my dragon!

Always check your enclosure is closed correctly, and never leave your dragon outside of its enclosure unsupervised. Dragons can move quite fast, so try to locate them as soon as possible. If you do lose your new pet, there are steps you can take:

- If possible, restrict dragon to the room it was lost in (i.e., if lost in the lounge room, close all windows, seal doors by wedging a towel underneath, close vents etc.)
- Dragons are more likely to find somewhere to climb up onto as they run (curtains, a window ledge, couch etc.)
- Look in places that emit heat like fridges, dishwashers, behind TVs, windowsills.
- If the animal cannot be located, contact the DBCA (Department of Biodiversity & Attractions) as soon as possible and follow their instructions.

Book a One-on-One Session

With over 40 years combined experience in the herpetology industry, the Discover Deadly team share a range on expertise. Consultant sessions are available for general advice or more specific issues. Bookings can be made online for \$30 up to 15 minutes.

Resources

Your first point of contact for advice/enquiries should always be your original breeder

however, there are several professional businesses that can be reached out to.

- Unusual Pet Vets (Murdoch) 08 6117 7440
- Unusual Pet Vets (Osbourne Park) 08 6117 7450
- Busselton Vet Hospital 08 9752 1433
- Discover Deadly 08 9755 1771
- Southwest Pets (Bunbury) 08 9721 6217
- DBCA 08 9442 0300

Further Reading:

- "Keeping Bearded Dragons" by Darren Green
- "Keeping & Breeding Australian Lizards" by Mike Swan
- "Australian Lizards: A Natural History" by Steve K Wilson
- "A Guide to Australian Dragons in Captivity" by Dr Danny Brown

This care sheet© has been produced as a general guide for Western Australian reptile keepers. It should not replace the advice of a veterinarian.

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