

TURTLES (Freshwater)

(NW. Red-faced, Oblong & Steindachner)



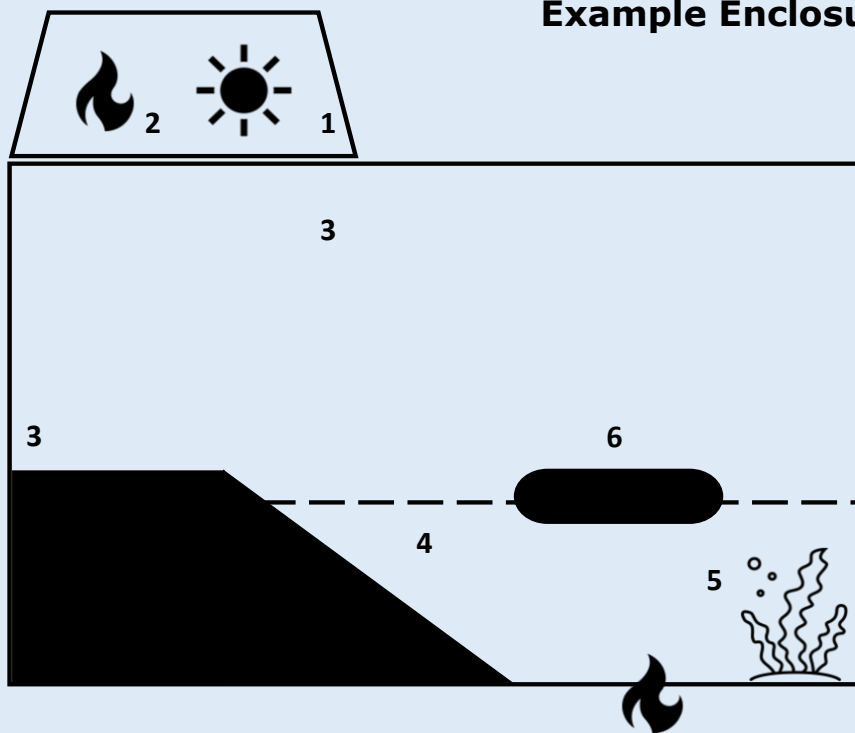
You can't get any cuter than a baby turtle, but having any pet that predominantly lives in water requires high maintenance and a more in-depth/costly setup. Get this right through and you will be provided with hours of entertainment watching your turtles grow, swim, climb, explore and forage for food.

Housing

Enclosure Size: Enclosure size will depend on the number of turtles you intend to house; however, our recommendation is to begin with a single individual. A single turtle should have enough room to bask on land, swim freely without bumping the sides of the tank and maintain a solid thermal gradient (cool end, warm end). Turtles need water to live in but will also require an area of dry land to rest on and excavate/burrow (species specific). A suitable tank/enclosure size for a single juvenile turtle would be 100cmLx50cmDx50cmW. Enclosure size can be grown with your turtle as they age and require more room.

Outdoor enclosures are also an option for species that are local to colder climates (in WA this would be the Oblong Turtle), but precautions need to be made to ensure it is predator/escape proof, that there is protection from direct sunlight, and that your turtle(s) are still getting enough warmth, or can fully brumate, throughout cooler months; providing a deep, below ground burrow can help with this.

Example Enclosure Setup



1. UV light
2. Basking light
3. Dry area
4. Pond
5. Plants/hides
6. Floating dock
7. Pond heater (if required)

Temperature: Your turtle enclosure will have two heating elements; basking light/s

and a water heater. For most species, water temperature should sit at around 26-28°C, but can be as low as 22°C for Southern species. Basking lights should sit at no more than 30°C, and there should be one basking spot for each turtle you house. If you've decided on an outdoor pond, temperatures will need to be monitored to ensure their needs are being maintained.

Lighting/Heating: All turtles will need access to light within the UV spectrum; this not only regulates their day/night schedule, but also assists in the growth of healthy bones. This is especially important in turtles to ensure their shells develop correctly. There are many ways to heat/light your enclosure, but we have found the most success in:

- UV lighting over a basking spot (we recommend Arcadia Pro T5) 8-10 hrs.
- Basking light over dry land and/or a floating raft on water 10-12 hrs.
- Underwater pond heater (if required) to reach your species correct temp.

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: Some keepers prefer to not use substrate while their turtle is a juvenile so that waste and uneaten food can easily be scooped or syphoned out. If you choose to use substrate, there are many options available!

- Aquarium gravel: easy to clean but may be ingested.
- Aquarium rocks (large): cannot be ingested but can trap waste/food.
- Washed river sand: readily available but can trap waste/food.

Accessories: A turtle's enclosure will be more extensive than a regular reptile due to the addition of water maintenance. A basic turtle enclosure will need:

- A land portion big enough for your turtle to completely dry and bask.
- A hide and/or burrow on land.
- A hide/aquatic plants/cave submerged in water.
- A water filtration system.
- A water heater.

Handling

Turtles are not a species that should be handled often; this is due to the bacteria they may carry from their ponds, and the females' tendency to "musk" on their keepers when picked up. Larger turtles will have quite a powerful bite, and long-neck species can reach all the way to their hind legs. However, many keepers find enrichment in allowing turtles to explore outside of their enclosure; usually on grassed areas where they can roam freely while supervised. If you do wish to handle your turtle, there are a few steps you can take to ensure they are as safe and stress free as possible.

- As a juvenile, your turtle can be scooped into the palm of your hand, and gently held in place using your thumb. Caution is needed as it will take a while

for your turtle's carapace to firm up.

- Larger or adult turtles can be held firmly mid-shell using two hands.
- Remember to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after handling turtles.

Pets such as dogs and cats should be kept out of the area while you are handling your reptile, and supervision is always recommended for young children.

Feeding

Food: Freshwater turtles are true omnivores and eat a variety of bugs, plants, freshwater crustaceans, and meat, with juveniles happily eating mosquito larvae and bloodworms. It is important that you feed a variety of foods to ensure they receive the correct levels of vitamins and nutrients. Red meat should be reserved as a treat, with their main diet consisting of insects, freshwater mussels/fish/freshwater prawns & leafy vegetables. Turtles should be fed meals equivalent to the size of their head, with juveniles eating daily, and adults only 1-3 times a week.

Water: Monitoring water quality is an important part of being a responsible turtle keeper. You may also need a high-quality water filter that is designed for aquatic reptiles (ideally your filter should cycle the full volume of water 4 times daily). Weekly testing and water changes of 30-50% will help reduce the build-up of harmful ammonia, and any waste/food should be removed as soon as possible. It is worth investing in a water quality test kit to regularly check water levels.

Supplements: Calcium is necessary for all freshwater turtles, and lack of can result in bone diseases and abnormalities such as MBD. The easiest way to boost water calcium levels is with shell grit (aka "turtle grit") mixed in with your substrate at a ratio of 30g per litre. Slow-release calcium blocks are also available commercially.

Troubleshooting

My turtle isn't eating!

Your new turtle/s may need a few days to settle into their new environment – this can be a stressful time for them (and you). A few contributing factors could include:

- Temperature – is your enclosure at the correct heat for the species?
- Excess and/or stressful handling sessions.
- Food – they may require a change in diet.
- Feeding style – tongs or active hunting
- Where enclosure is located in the home – near drafts, direct sunlight etc.

Its winter and my turtle is acting different!

Depending on your enclosure type (indoor or outdoor), your turtle/s may go into a state of brumation 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). This is less likely to happen in an indoor enclosure due to our ability to regulate the temperatures. You may find your turtle/s are hiding away in their burrows and they may not come out except to bask

or drink. Food can still be offered occasionally if they are seen out basking.

MDB and how to spot it!

Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) is the most common disease in captive turtles; this is from a lack of calcium/vitamin D3 and can be prevented by using supplements and correct UV lighting. Turtles will need a full spectrum UV light (we recommend Arcadia Pro T5) to ensure that their bodies can develop bones correctly, as well as calcium supplementation in their water. Some early signs of MBD include:

- Shell deformities
- Soft shells
- Stunted growth

Does my turtle shed?

Turtles shed the individual sections of their carapace called "scutes". It is not recommended that keepers peel these off manually, as accidental damage may occur to any still-developing keratin layer underneath. Between shed cycles your turtle may appreciate the occasional gentle carapace scrub to remove any environmental build up; this can be done with a soft bristled brush in gentle, circular motions (they have full feeling in their shells!).

Shedding will vary within species and with age from a few times a year as a juvenile, to about once a year as an adult. A few other reasons that can affect shedding behaviours would be:

- Environmental conditions.
- Poor nutrition.
- Shell rot.
- Carapace injury/trauma*

*Any injuries/trauma to carapace (dropped, crushed, pet attack etc.) will require IMMEDIATE vet attention.

All things fungus!

Fungal infections are surprisingly common among pet turtles but can be prevented with the correct husbandry and water maintenance. Fungus growth will appear in small, sometimes raised, or discoloured patches that can be found on the carapace, neck, or limbs. Shell rot is also something to watch out for and can be life threatening if not treated early enough. Fungus prevention would include:

- Appropriate enclosure size (water volume)
- Water filtration
- Manual cleaning of faeces/uneaten food
- Water changes
- Chemical maintenance

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/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:

- "A Guide to Australian Turtles in Captivity" by Adam Elliot
- "Keeping Long-neck Turtles" by Darren Green
- "Keeping Short-neck Turtles" by Darren Green

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

Discover Deadly takes no responsibility in the misuse of the information provided.

www.discoverdeadly.com.au 2023