



## Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital

# MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISE CARE SHEET

### Enclosure

Ideally a floor pen or tortoise table should be created with as large an area as possible being provided. But remember as the size increases extra basking sites will need to be provided. Walls should be a minimum of 1 foot in height and sturdy enough to not allow escape. Good ventilation is required.

The enclosure should be cleaned out at least once a week with a suitable disinfectant and spot cleaned daily to help prevent disease.

### Substrate

The substrate is what lines the bottom of the cage. The ideal substrate is non-abrasive, non-toxic and easy to clean.

Substrates suitable for housing tortoises include newspaper, Astroturf, and some of the commercially available substrates. Natural substrate such as soil may also be used to allow for digging. It is important that the substrates cannot be eaten as this leaves reptiles at risk of developing an intestinal obstruction. Wood-chip based substrates should never be used for this reason.



### Landscape and Furnishings

Hides are required to provide some security. Artificial plants, cardboard boxes, plant pots or commercially available hides can be used. They should be placed both at the warm and cooler ends of the tank.

### Companions

In general tortoises will prefer to be housed alone. Should breeding be required the males can be exposed to the females during the summer months.

### Temperature

Tortoises have the same temperature as their surroundings. They require supplementary heat to remain healthy and carry out normal bodily functions such as digestion. Heat sources should be guarded to prevent thermal burns.

Temperatures should be measured with a maximum/minimum thermometer. The basking area should be kept at 35-40°C. The cool end should be maintained at 25°C. Tortoises like a temperature gradient so that if they are cold, they can move to a warmer part of the cage and vice versa. Place a good quality thermostat in the enclosure at the level of your tortoises so that you can monitor the temperature. Ensure that the overnight temperature does not drop below 20°C.

### Lighting

Mediterranean tortoises must be exposed to UV-b light. In the wild, tortoises would absorb UV-b light from the sun and convert it into Vitamin D. However, in captivity we must provide UV-b lighting for tortoises as UV-b does not penetrate through windows when housed indoors. This lighting will need to be on all day for 12 hours.

All UV-b bulbs should be checked regularly for their UV output and should be changed at least as frequently as manufacturer's instructions. Typically, this is every 6 months.



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During the summer months it is also important to expose your tortoise to natural UV light during the summer months.

### Water and Humidity

Water should always be available and should be changed daily. Bathing is also to be encouraged and twice a week the tortoise should be placed in a shallow bath of warm water.

Humidity should be checked with a hygrometer and kept low-moderate depending on the species.

### Hygiene

The cage and food and water bowls should be cleaned routinely. Rinse the items well after cleaning.

Tortoises can harbor the bacteria *salmonella*, which although rarely a cause of illness in tortoises, can be dangerous to people, with young children or those who are immuno-compromised at higher risk. So good hygiene after handling the reptile is important. Generally washing your hands in soap is sufficient. Always seek prompt medical attention if you become unwell.

### Diet

Their diet should consist largely, over 70%, of weeds and plants. Suitable weeds include sow thistles, dandelions, clover, buttercup, milk thistles, plantains, chickweed, dock and bindweed. Any plants fed should be free of any pesticides or fertilizer. Approx. 25% of the diet should be vegetables such as spinach, cucumber, fennel, watercress, broccoli, spring greens, etc. And no more than 5% of the diet should include fruit such as apple, pear and strawberries, etc.

Supplementation is important, particularly with supermarket bought goods and a vitamin and mineral powder with high calcium content is required. It is important to ensure the phosphorous content is low. These supplements will help promote good bone growth and general good health.

### Pet Insurance

Did you know your Mediterranean tortoise could live for over 50 years? Did you also know that you can take out pet insurance for your tortoise? This would mean that financial concerns do not have to add to the worry of having a sick pet. We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. Please ask a member of staff for a leaflet on exotic animal pet insurance.

### Annual Checks and Healthy Pets Plan

We recommend health checks every year for pet reptiles as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage.

We also have a Healthy Pets Plan to help spread the cost of routine treatments over the course of 12 months. The plan includes faecal screening, worming and parasite treatment as necessary, annual health checks, microchipping, claw clipping and other benefits.

Please ask a member of staff about the benefits of the healthy pets' plan or ask for a leaflet which details prices and benefits.