

BEGINNERS INFORMATION GUIDE - MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISES

BASIC KIT LIST NEEDED FOR FOSTERING

All items listed are available through club at fair rates, the small profit made going towards further club work. Proof of purchase is required for items acquired from other sources before tortoises are placed.

- Mercury Vapour Bulb - All in one – UVB / heat eg. 125 watts Solar Glo / 100 watt Arcadia £35
- Ceramic clamp lamp holder for bulb. Eg. Exo terra medium glo lamp £15
- Insulating Poly-box for hibernation, if not fridge hibernating, £5
- Temperature probe (ideally max/min).
- Basic digital scales which weigh in increments of 1g,
- Toothbrush for cleaning tortoise in corners ideal!
- Washing up bowl or margarine tub (depending on tort size).

ADVISED PURCHASES

- Selection of edible garden plants eg. Honeysuckle, Sedums, Lavatera and Mallow.
- Time clock set to 10–12 hours per day.
- Andy and Nadine Highfield 'Beginner's guide to keeping med torts' (Amazon)
- Tamodine (Vetark) wash, (small drop in water and brush clean once a week. Rinse with water)
- Nutrobal or Reptavite vitamin and calcium supplement.
- Limestone tortoise chalk block, granules and flour.
- Tortoise seed mix.
- Caresheet information bundle.

A DONATION OF £25 TOWARDS ADMIN AND REHOMING COSTS IS REQUESTED.

HOW MUCH SPACE?

- Foster tortoises are normally around 15-30cm in length. As a rough guide, an outdoor enclosure should be provided of 1 square foot for every 1cm of tortoise. Temporary, bad weather indoor setups should have heat lamp and need to be 2ft x 4ft, minimum, in size, eg. greenhouse, shed with polycarbonate roof, conservatory or garage area. Tortoises are matched to suit spaces available. If unsure of suitability, send photos of possible indoor and outdoor areas so we can discuss your options.

CHOOSING A SPACE?

- Sunniest spot in garden is ideal to allow as much access to natural sunshine for tortoise. Where possible, access to a full garden with secure fencing and fenced off pond works well, but specific feature areas in a garden can also produce brilliant homes.

INITIAL CARE FOR NEW TORTOISE

First 10 days, bath tortoise everyday in lukewarm water for 15 – 20 minutes. This encourages tortoise to be active and not become dehydrated from the stress of a new environment. Bath 2 -3 times a week after this, ideally before feeding, to raise temperature and in turn encourage feeding.

COMMON SENSE KEEPING

Enjoy observing your tortoise, but also ask yourself questions.

- If tortoise hides in a corner – Is tortoise too cold?
- If tortoise refuses to eat – Is tortoise cold or showing unusual signs, which may mean it is ill?
- If tortoise shell begins to ridge or appear very plastic looking – Is tortoise growing too fast or not getting enough access to outdoors and natural sunlight? Does food need to be cut back?
- Tortoise found upside down – do I need to change something in the tortoise setup?

If unsure, consult a knowledgeable vet, specialist forum or come along to a tortoise club meeting.

INDOOR SETUP

- Keep tortoise on 2:1 soil:sand mix, around 5-6 inches deep. Keep soil loose so tortoises can burrow. Give access to hides with pieces of wood and decorate with edible plants.
- Heat lamp - Aim to have lamp on between 8 – 12 hours a day, ideally when you are around to make sure tortoise does not turn on back.
- Keep area under lamp simple to avoid overturned tortoises from overheating under lamp.
- Secure indoor and outdoor tray/run with mesh if there is a risk of dogs, cats, mice or rats. Bring tortoise in overnight and keep at room temperature in bad weather.
- Maintain a moist/damp sand soil substrate by spraying water and pouring water from a jug every few days or everyday if required.
- Clear away dried up weeds, poo pick and clean water bowl with Tamodine as required.

FEEDING

- Feed tortoise on slate, or similar, to avoid ingestion of substrate and thus avoid internal blockage.
- Give access to lots of calcium supplement in block, granules and by light dusting of Nutrobal/ Reptavite on every meal (tropical species also require Vionate). In summer months limestone flour can also be used on alternative days.
- Give a small handful of weeds, edible plants and access to fresh water every day.
- **Give your tortoise as much variety as possible.** You can find lists of edible food plants online or through your local club **TOP TIP:** use www.tortoisetable.co.uk and 'Google Image' internet tool to expand your knowledge of the many edible plants which are good for tortoises to eat. Online directory.
- Give access to a shallow bowl of calcium granules and chalk lump in run. Also ensure there is access to shallow water dishes, moist substrate sand/ soil substrate and regular baths to avoid internal bladder or bowel blockages.

OUTDOORS

- Allow your tortoise access to a safe outdoor enclosure wherever possible, as natural sunlight is the best way for a tortoise to obtain vital vitamin D3 from the sun. In summer this should be at least 9.00am till 5.00pm.
- Setup design help can be found online with websites mentioned below. Initially a solid edged rabbit ark can work well as long as on level soil and not all grass and in a sunny spot. A cold frame or similar will also be required.
- The **edge of any tortoise setup must be solid in construction.** A tortoise will spend all day trying to escape through glass or mesh, causing stress and often harming themselves in the process. Whether metal, wood or brick, height of perimeter walls must be double the length of the tortoise. Corners should ideally be covered to prevent escape through climbing. Always remember not to place climbing aids such as pots close to the edge of open topped runs.

- Ideally you should aim to buy a cold frame or greenhouse, and create a run in a sunny spot within your garden.
- Pay particular attention to '10 do's and don't' care sheets and aim to read as much as possible about your new pet through the websites and books suggested. If you still have questions, please don't hesitate to contact your local club, knowledgeable tortoise vet or online forum for further help.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

- www.tortoiseclub.org – Care sheets and Norfolk based club meetings
- www.thetortoisetable.co.uk – Online photo dictionary of tortoise food and forum
- www.tlady.clara.net – user friendly information – great printable edible tortoise weeds guide
- www.shelledwarriors.co.uk - online forum
- www.tortoisetrust.org – Largest UK organization– Good for care sheets, articles and books

LOCAL NORFOLK BASED VETS – WITH EXPERIENCE IN TORTOISES – (others upon request)

- UPLAND WAY VETS - Attleborough and Diss, Tel: 01379 642865 www.uplandswayvets.co.uk/
- TERRINGTON VETS – near Kings Lynn, Tel: 01553 828423 www.terringtonvets.co.uk
- ALL CREATURES VETS – Norwich, Tel: 01603 898984 www.allcreatureshealthcare.co.uk

PET INSURANCE

With correct husbandry illness is low risk, so insurance is optional.