**Aquatic Turtles – Care Sheet**

**Red-Eared Slider:** *Trachemys scripta elegans*

**Yellow-Bellied Slider:** *Trachemys scripta scripta*

Aquatic turtles are a popular choice for many reptile owners because they are cute and entertaining. Because they live such long lives, however, it is important to realize what kind of commitment you are making before buying a turtle. Knowing how to provide the proper care is essential to giving your turtle a happy, healthy life. Below are some general care guidelines, although it is always important to thoroughly research the specific turtle species you’re interested in keeping.

**Basic Info**

Age: The average age is 15-25 years, but with proper care they may live much longer

Length: Up to 12 inches (females are typically larger than males)

Weight: Up to 3 lbs.

Sexual maturity: 3-5 years (males), 5-10 (females)

Gestation: 60 days, 2-20 eggs

Incubation: 55-75 days

**Behavior**

If you are home during the day, an aquatic turtle may be the right choice for you, since that is when they are most active. They will forage for food in the water, swim around, and head above water to bask.

We generally caution against trying to bring in turtles found in the wild. They do not adapt as well to captivity as farm-raised turtles. Additionally, it is important to buy a turtle from a reputable vendor or pet store. Roadside vendors sell baby turtles that lack proper warmth and nutrition. They may be doomed from the start, even if you do everything right as its owner. If you have bought a pet from a roadside vendor, it is important to have your turtle checked out by a vet.

**Diet**

Aquatic turtles are omnivores, gradually eating a more plant-based diet as they get older. Vitamin A and calcium deficiency is common if they do not eat a balanced diet. Their diet should be a mix of:

* Aquatic turtle pellets – recommended brands are Mazuri, ReptoMin and ZooMed
* Protein sources like small, whole fish, insects, worms, dried krill
* Leafy green vegetables, such as collard greens, mustard greens, and dandelion greens or other aquatic plants

**Environment & Caging**

Aquatic turtles require a lot of space. Even when it is a baby, it is important that its environment is large enough for it to grow into. Its environment should also be as close to what it would be like in the wild as possible. That means it has plenty of room to swim and enjoy time out of the water to bask in the sunlight (or artificial light if kept indoors). Your turtle’s environment should:

* Be wide, long, and deep enough for swimming and diving
* Have a water temperature of 75-80ºF
* Contain a log, ledge, or some other area of dry land for basking and drying off
* Make sure the basking area is kept at a temperature of 85-90ºF. Also, provide a shaded area.
* Provide plenty of UVB light for proper growth. If you are keeping your turtle indoors, you will need a UV light and a heat-emitting light to maintain a proper temperature in the basking area.
* Have a water filtration system and test the water to make sure parameters are normal. We recommend filters be double what is recommended for your tank size is (i.e. a 50 gallon tank would need a 100 gallon filter).

You should change your turtle’s water every 1-2 weeks or even more frequently to avoid health problems. Additionally, while many place gravel in the bottom of the tank, this can provide a choking or ingestion hazard. It is alright to have a bare-bottomed tank or use stones larger than the turtle’s head.

**Veterinary Care & Preventive Care**

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months, where we can perform a fecal examination for parasites and order blood work if necessary.

Since many aquatic turtles suffer from poor husbandry at birth/before adoption, it is important to be on the lookout for health issues such as swollen eyes. This could indicate an infection or a vitamin A deficiency, which is a common affliction.

Another common problem is respiratory infection or pneumonia. Watch for symptoms such as:

* Small mucus bubbles coming from the nose
* Bubbles around the eyes
* Floating oddly, such as tilting toward one side
* Struggling to get to the surface (straining its neck and opening its mouth)

For either of the issues listed above, it is important to contact a vet quickly to discuss your options. Other common health problems can include soft shell, stunting, and shell or skin infection.