**Box Turtle – Care Sheet**

**Eastern Box Turtle:** *Terrapene carolina*

**Ornate Box Turtle:** *Terrapene ornata ornata*

Box turtles are full of personality and can make wonderful pets. There are numerous species available in the pet trade besides the two listed above. They do best outside and also live a very long time. They could be a life-long companion. Taking the following information into account is a good jumping off point for helping your box turtle live a happy, healthy life. Be sure to check the laws in your state, as some native species of box turtle may be illegal to own as a pet. A box turtle should never be taken from the wild and kept as a pet as decline of this species in the wild is a big conservation concern.

**Basic Info**

Age: can live from 50-100 years

Size: 4-6 inches carapace length

Weight: 400-600 grams (1-1.5lbs)

Sexual maturity: 5-10 years old

Egg laying: 3-6 eggs laid in the spring or summer

**Behavior**

Box turtles are generally quite tame and do well together in groups. While they do well in captivity, they may not be the ideal pet for someone who wants an animal to cuddle or play with. They do tend to be more easy going and less likely to retract into their shell than many tortoises. Additionally, it is important to closely supervise any children who are around the tortoises, because they may not understand this information.

**Diet**

Diet can vary by species, but most box turtles are true omnivores, eating a variety of plant and animal matter. In the wild this includes various insects and worms and various plants, flowers, and fruits. In captivity we recommend offering a variety of food items such as:

* Healthy greens like mustard greens, turnip greens, collard greens, dandelion greens
* Various squashes, zucchini, sweet potato, bell peppers, carrots
* Broccoli, snow or snap peas, green beans, other green veggies
* Fruit offered as a treat
* Earthworms, Crickets, Dubia roaches, and phoenix worms are good staple prey items (earthworms are a particular favorite!)
* Superworms, waxworms, and mealworms can be offered for variety, but are high in fat so they should not be staples
* Avoid dog or cat foods

Adults should have their food dusted with a phosphorus-free calcium supplement 2-3 times a week and a multivitamin weekly. Juveniles should have calcium supplementation more often.

Of course, make sure your box turtle always has fresh, clean water available. They also enjoy having a shallow water dish they can climb in to soak.

**Environment & Caging**

Most box turtles do best outside. They can be kept outdoors all year round, but in certain areas of the country they will hibernate during the cooler months. They need to have an area they can dig or burrow in to hibernate safely, otherwise they will need to come indoors for winter. They also are surprisingly good climbers so fencing needs to be tall enough or made from materials that will prevent that and prevent digging out. It’s also important they are protected from outdoor predators. They should have areas of sun, shade, and shelters or hide boxes.

When kept indoors, box turtles should be provided an overhead heat source that will provide a basking area of 85-90oF and a cooler area of about 75-80°F. They also need to have a UVB light provided which mimics the sun. In addition to a basking area, make sure there is a shaded area and some form of shelter or a hide box in the cooler area of your tortoise’s enclosure. Various substrates can be used including coconut fiber, cypress mulch, or non-particulate beddings.

**Veterinary & Preventive Care**

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months, where a veterinarian can perform a fecal examination for parasites and order bloodwork if necessary. If your box turtle has sustained any trauma due to another animal, seek veterinary help quickly. Other ailments that can affect box turtles include retained eggs in females, respiratory tract infections and pneumonia, and swollen eyelids from Vitamin A deficiency.

Additionally, while some turtles can go weeks without eating in the wild, decreased appetite in a pet turtle may be the sign of an illness. Consult with a veterinarian if you are concerned.