**Tortoises – Care Sheet**

**Sulcata:** *Centrochelys sulcata*

**Red Footed:** *Chelonoidis carbonaria*

**Russian:** *Agrionemys horsfieldii*

**Greek:** *Testudo graeca*

Tortoises are not your typical exotic pet. These guys do best outside, and they don’t really take well to cuddling. They also live a very long time. They could be a life-long companion. However, they are relatively easy to care for, and watching them plod around your yard munching on plants can be quite entertaining. We also think they are quite cute! Taking the following information into account is a good jumping off point for helping your tortoise live a happy, healthy life, although it is always important to research the specific species before bringing your new friend home.

**Basic Info**

Age: Tortoises typically live more than 50 years. Many will even live to be more than 100!

Size: While all of these tortoises start off tiny and cute as babies, their adult weights can range from just a few pounds to more than 100 lbs.

**Behavior**

If you’ve ever been to the zoo, you have a pretty good idea of tortoise behavior. They are generally quite tame and can do well together in groups, though typically two males will often fight. While they do well in captivity, they may not be the ideal pet for someone who wants an animal to cuddle or play with.

**Diet**

Different tortoise species have different needs. The red-footed tortoise is an omnivore, and as such, will need a mix of fruits, vegetables and a small amount of animal protein. This can include various insects, mealworms, and earthworms. Tortoise chow or pellets should be the smallest part of the diet for all of the species discussed here, if given at all, and it should always be fed soaked in water.

Most all tortoises are herbivores, preferring to graze in the yard, on grass hays, and dark leafy green vegetables like collard or mustard greens. A small amount of other shredded vegetables can be added for variety, but fruit should be avoided.

For all tortoises, diversity is key to a healthy diet. Talk to a vet if

you have questions about what to provide and what brands of

tortoise chow are the best. Additionally, you may need to dust your tortoise’s food with a calcium powder a few times a week or offer a cuttlebone. Always make sure your tortoise has access to fresh, clean water both to drink and soak in.

**Environment & Caging**

Most tortoises do best outside. As such, the climate in your area may impact which species of tortoise you choose because you will want to mimic your tortoise’s natural habitat as much as possible. Some may prefer a dryer climate, while some will need more tropical, humid temperatures. Proper humidity is vital in preventing pyramiding of the shell.

In general, your tortoise will need plenty of heat at 90-100°F on the warm side and access to UVB radiation. Natural sunlight is always the best option, but artificial UVB lighting is needed indoors. In addition to a basking area, make sure there is a shaded area as well. Also, provide some form of shelter or a hide box in the cooler area of your tortoise’s enclosure. Rabbit food made from timothy hay actually makes very good bedding for tortoises, or you can use mulch, coconut fiber, or similar substrates.

Most importantly for outdoor tortoises, it is vital that their enclosure keeps them safe. If there are other animals in the area, such as dogs, raccoons, etc., you need to make sure your tortoise is in a safe space, because attacks can happen. Fire ants can also severely injure or kill outdoor tortoises. Some species will hibernate if outdoors all year round, and some need to be brought indoors or provided with a heated dog house or shed if staying outside in the cooler months.

**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 tortoise has sustained any trauma due to another animal, seek veterinary help quickly. Some other ailments that can affect tortoises include retained eggs (in females), respiratory tract infections and pneumonia, and swollen eyelids.

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

Another excellent resource for tortoise care is [www.tortoisetrust.org](http://www.tortoisetrust.org)