

Hermann/Russian

Tortoise

Care Sheet



All around the world, you can find a wide variety of tortoises living in environments ranging from dry deserts to lush rainforests. They survive on a diverse diet consisting of different plants, fruits, and vegetables, with various species preferring specific types of food. To ensure that your tortoise's life closely resembles its natural habitat, it is crucial to consider several factors: providing a suitable environment, maintaining a healthy diet, promoting normal behaviour, and protecting it from harm. Tortoises are kind and gentle creatures, but they are also very shy. Typically, they are active during the day, but depending on the time of year and temperature, they may slow down and sleep more frequently.

Get to know

Getting to know your tortoise is important. You need to learn its likes and dislikes and recognise when it is in distress or unwell. It's essential to ensure that they always feel safe and loved. Building a bond is crucial, as the tortoise will learn your scent and recognise you as its protector.

Many people may not realise that a tortoise's shell has many nerve endings, which means they can feel your touch and also experience pain. Therefore, it's important to handle them with care, even though their shells are hard. Tortoises can also mistake objects for food; one common misconception is that they often think toes are food. So, be cautious when walking barefoot around them.

Enclosure

Tortoise enclosures are different from those for other reptiles, as tortoises do not thrive well in a vivarium like many other species. To keep your tortoise happy and healthy, it will need both indoor and outdoor enclosures. Your indoor enclosure should be a minimum of 4 feet long for an adult tortoise, ensuring it has enough space to roam around comfortably. It's important to provide a heat lamp to keep the tortoise warm when temperatures drop. The enclosure does not need a lid or cover, as long as the sides are high enough to prevent the tortoise from climbing out. For the outdoor enclosure, a minimum size of 4 feet is recommended, but a larger space is preferable. Make sure it is located in a well-drained area that receives both shade and sunlight. Keeping tortoises on heavy, wet soil can lead to respiratory problems and increase the risk of infections.

Temperature

Tortoises are cold-blooded animals and require a heat source to maintain their body temperature. The best options are an overhead lamp with a mercury vapour (MV) bulb or a ceramic heat bulb. It is essential to use a thermostat to ensure the temperature remains within the correct range, as tortoises can suffer from overheating as well as being too cold. The basking spot should be set at a temperature of 30°C to 35°C, while the surrounding areas should be maintained at a minimum of 20°C to 25°C to prevent the tortoise from getting too cold.

LIFESPAN

50 to 100
years in
captivity

SIZE

15-25cm

TEMPERATURE

Hot end: 30°C - 35 °C
Cold end: 20 °C - 25 °C

HUMIDITY

40% - 60%

Environment

Substrate: Provide your tortoise with bedding that mimics its natural habitat. The best option is an organic top soil mixed with kid-friendly play sand (70:30 ratio). Allowing enough depth for them to dig and explore their environment. Always giving in a nice light spray daily.

Décor: Decoration is an essential part of a tortoise's enclosure because it promotes exercise and engages their natural instincts. Adding large branches for them to burrow under and rocks for them to climb helps keep their nails filed. Additionally, artificial plants can help mimic their natural environment.

Cleaning: It is essential to keep your enclosure clean. Promptly spot clean your enclosure whenever you notice waste. Additionally, all substrates must be replaced at least once a month, and the enclosure must be thoroughly cleaned using reptile-safe disinfectant.

Diet

Feeding: A tortoise's diet is crucial for maintaining its health and strength. Tortoises are strictly herbivores, meaning they eat only plants and no other animals. It is essential to research what your tortoise can and cannot eat, as not all vegetables and plants are safe for them; some can even be toxic to them. Safe food options include lettuce, cucumber, banana, strawberries, dandelions, and clover. Additionally, it is important to use calcium powder daily to provide the extra vitamins and minerals your tortoise needs.

<https://www.tortoisecentre.co.uk/advice/tortoise-diet/>

Water: Ensure your tortoise has access to fresh water daily. Provide a sufficiently large bowl so that your tortoise can bathe in it if desired. They need to soak in their water bowl or even in a tub you put them in, as it helps them pass their food.

Tortoise's weight

The weight of a tortoise may not be immediately noticeable and should be measured instead. Adult tortoises typically weigh between 2 kg and 4 kg. It's important to weigh them regularly, as significant weight loss can be a concerning sign that requires a veterinarian's attention.

Tortoise's gender

If you're uncertain about a tortoise's gender, you can easily determine it by examining their tail. Female tortoises have shorter tails that may stick straight out, while male tortoises have longer tails that are tucked to the side.



Health & Welfare

A healthy Hermann's tortoise exhibits bright eyes, a smooth and hard shell, clear nostrils and mouth, and active, confident behaviour. They should be alert, move with their shell raised off the ground, and show interest in their environment.

If you suspect your tortoise is unwell, the best course of action is to take it to a veterinarian. Avoid attempting to do anything yourself, as this could cause further damage and pain.



Tortoise



Hibernation

The Hermann's tortoise is a hibernating species, and hibernation is crucial for their growth as it helps maintain a slow and steady growth rate. However, there are specific situations when a tortoise should not be hibernated. These include:

1. If the tortoise is ill.
2. If you have owned the tortoise for less than a year.
3. If the tortoise is underweight.

For adult Hermann's tortoises, hibernation can last up to 16 weeks, while younger tortoises typically hibernate for about 8 to 10 weeks.

Hibernation requires careful preparation, and it's essential to do thorough research and follow the proper steps before proceeding. If not done correctly, there is a risk that your tortoise may not survive the hibernation process.

Transport

When taking your animals out with you, you must ensure their travel box is safe for them. Ensure there is enough room for your tortoise to sit comfortably, but not so much that they can be knocked around. If they are new to travel, then even putting a cloth over so that there is darkness to help calm them. Ensure it's well-ventilated, but also ensure there's no escape. Heat is vital; bring a battery heat pack or a hot water bottle to help provide heat so they stay comfortable.

Diseases and Concerns

Hermann's tortoises, like all reptiles, can be susceptible to various diseases and health concerns. These include metabolic bone disease, respiratory infections, shell problems (like pyramiding and rot), parasites, and gastrointestinal issues. Maintaining a proper diet, temperature, humidity, and providing access to UVB lighting are crucial for preventing these problems. Shell Problems:

Pyramiding: Abnormal shell growth, where scutes (shell plates) become raised and pointed, often due to MBD or improper diet.

Shell Rot: A bacterial or fungal infection that can affect the shell, often caused by injury, poor hygiene, or damp conditions.

It's essential to take the time to research the potential diseases that can affect tortoises. If you acquire a tortoise, monitor its health daily and consult a reptile veterinarian immediately if you notice any of the aforementioned issues.