

## CLEANING

Remove droppings and any uneaten fresh food daily. Water bowls should be washed, dried and refilled regularly. Vivariums should be completely cleaned out and disinfected with a pet-safe disinfectant on a regular basis. Soiled substrate should be disposed of and replaced daily through a spot-cleaning regime.

## HANDLING

Bearded Dragons are usually very docile and rarely bite. The spines along their sides are soft unless the body is inflated in defence when frightened. Your movements should be slow and gentle but confident. To pick up your Bearded Dragon place one hand above the shoulders and support the underside with your other hand. Many Bearded Dragons enjoy their owner's company and seem content whilst being handled.

Reptiles can carry Salmonella, which can be transferred to humans. Good hygiene and washing your hands after handling your Bearded Dragon should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.

## PET CODE OF PRACTICE

Never release a pet (companion animal) into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death, as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment. This includes the need to properly dispose of soiled substrate, so that eggs and live food can't escape into the wild.

## SHOPPING LIST

- vivarium
- substrate
- heat mat/spotlight
- UVB tube/UVB heat lamp
- thermometer x2
- silver reflector for tubes
- dome reflector
- thermostat
- food and small water bowl
- live foods, chopped fruit and vegetables
- calcium supplement
- vitamin supplement
- cage furnishings
- pet-safe disinfectant
- Bearded Dragon care book



## THE FIVE ANIMAL WELFARE NEEDS

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

- 1 Environment:** pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
- 2 Diet:** pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
- 3 Behaviour:** all pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
- 4 Company:** some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
- 5 Health:** all animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.



This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

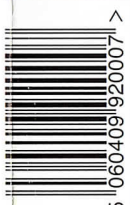
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# GUIDE TO CARING FOR BEARDED DRAGONS

the  
**pet**   
**charity**  
*For joy, health & companionship*



Bearded Dragons originate from Australia, and the name comes from the pouch under the neck, which inflates if they feel threatened. Adults can reach sizes of 45 – 60cm and can live for over 10 years.

## THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR BEARDED DRAGONS

The colours vary from browns and greys, to pastel green, gold, orange and red. They are a rock dwelling species of lizard and love to climb and bask in the sun.

Bearded Dragons are not social animals and adult makes can be territorial, so they are best kept singularly.

### GENERAL CARE

- **Diarrhoea:** this can be caused by many problems including incorrect feeding or internal parasites.
- **Mouth rot:** cheesy deposits appear in the mouth.
- **Respiratory problems:** signs include fluid or mucus from the nose and abnormal breathing.
- **Metabolic bone diseases:** signs may include deformed or swollen limbs or jaws, paralysed hind limbs and/or abnormal twitching. This is due to a lack of calcium, vitamin D3 and/or a lack of exposure to UVB light and heat. It can be stabilised if caught in time and properly treated.
- **Nails:** overgrown nails can often indicate your pet isn't getting enough exercise or is inactive for another reason. If nails become overgrown they will need to be trimmed with specialist equipment and your vet or pet shop will be able to advise.

If you are at all worried about the health of your Bearded Dragon you should consult your vet as soon as possible. It is recommended to seek a vet that has experience with reptiles.

Your pet should also be insured against unexpected veterinary costs.

### CHOOSING YOUR BEARDED DRAGON

A healthy Bearded Dragon will be bright, alert and active with its body and leg muscles appearing well-formed and strong. It will have clear, bright eyes, and no sign of discharge from its mouth or vent. The vent will be clean, with no faeces around it. There should be no signs of injury to the body, and when it moves the body should be held clear of the ground.

### HOUSING

A wide, escape-proof vivarium with good ventilation is the most suitable housing for a Bearded Dragon. The minimum cage size for an adult should be 120x60x60cm, preferably larger if possible.

### LIGHTING

Bearded Dragons are diurnal lizards and require high intensity UVB and UVA lighting to fully absorb and utilise the calcium in their diet. UVB can be supplied with fluorescent tubes or UVB/heat lamps. These lights must be at the correct distance from the Bearded Dragon so be sure to check the manufacturer's instructions carefully when installing. Lights should be left on for 12 – 14 hours each day. The bulbs will need replacing regularly as their UV output decreases with use.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Adults can reach sizes of 45 – 60cm and can live for over 10 years.



### TEMPERATURE

All reptiles are cold blooded and need an external heat source to maintain their body temperature. One end of the vivarium should be heated to create a thermal gradient, allowing the pet to choose its preferred temperature. The ideal thermal gradient is 26 – 28°C at the cool end and 35 – 40°C at the hot end. Night temperature can be dropped to a minimum of 16 – 18°C, which will benefit your pet as this reflects its natural environment.

Background heat can be provided by using heat mats and warmer basking zones created with spot lights or heat lamps. Your pet shop can advise on heating products that are suitable for your particular setup.

Digital thermometers should be placed at each end to monitor the temperature range and the maximum temperature of the heat gradient should be controlled by a thermostat. You should fit wire mesh guards over exposed heat sources to prevent thermal burns.

### HUMIDITY

Bearded Dragons, being desert species, require low humidity and good ventilation.

### FURNISHINGS

The floor of the cage should be covered with a suitable substrate. Some people recommend natural substrates like sand/soil mixes, while others opt for lino or slate, which reduce the risk of impaction, but prevent some natural behaviour like digging. Your pet shop can advise on the different options. Bearded Dragons will eat sand if lacking in calcium so the correct temperatures, calcium supplementation and access to UV light is essential.

Provide a shelter with a piece of cork bark, for example, and additional bark or branches to create areas for climbing. It is essential to provide your pet with a place to hide and feel secure, and it's also highly beneficial during skin shedding.

### FOOD AND WATER

Bearded Dragons are omnivores and become more vegetarian as they get older. They will eat a varied diet of live insects (as large as the width of their heads), fruit and vegetables. Fruit should only be fed in limited quantities due to the high energy content.

Young Bearded Dragons should be fed insects up to three times a day with a quarter of their diet made up of fruit and vegetables. Adults should be fed four or five times a week with at least half their diet made up of fruit and vegetables. Once their growth slows their appetite diminishes substantially.

Animal protein can be supplied as crickets, locusts and giant mealworms. Waxworms should be fed sparingly as they have a high fat content. When feeding crickets feed a few at a time, if they are eaten readily feed a couple more. Remove any uneaten live food after around 30 minutes as they annoy Bearded Dragons by nipping at them during the night.

It is important to feed the live food a nutritious diet and water to ensure your pet is also receiving a balanced diet. This is known as 'gut loading' the live food.

Suitable fruit and vegetables to feed your pet include kale, dandelion, watercress, carrots, squash, parsley, coriander and small amounts of fruit.

Fruit and vegetables should be washed and dried before feeding.

Bearded Dragons may not recognise still water as drinkable. They respond to refraction of light on moving water so shallow food and water bowls should be provided.

Regular weighing of your Bearded Dragon is a useful way of assessing its growth and ensuring it maintains a healthy weight.

It is very important that food should be dusted with a vitamin/calcium supplement and pure calcium on a regular basis; once or twice a week for non-breeding adults and all food for juveniles and egg-laying females.

Failure to undertake such dietary supplementation may result in metabolic bone diseases and other such problems. Check with your pet shop for the best supplements to use for your Bearded Dragon.

