



Jungle Bob's Care Sheet Russian Tortoises (*Testudo/Agrionemys horsfieldi*)

General Information

Russian Tortoises are extremely responsive, calm in temperament, unwilling to bite, and often live for decades. While no tortoise may be considered an “easy pet”, this plucky little fellow is a good choice for folks able to meet its needs.

The Russian Tortoise ranges over much of central Asia, from Russia's Caspian Sea to Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northwestern China. Favored habitats include rocky deserts and steppes, where summers are hot and dry and winters extremely cold.



The domed carapace (upper shell) is light to yellowish-brown in color and bears dark brown blotches. Adults measure 6-8.8 inches in length.

Housing

Russian Tortoises fare best in commercial tortoise cages or large aquariums (55 gallon or larger). A small circulating fan may be needed to provide adequate ventilation when aquariums are used. A strip of cardboard along the lower edges of the tank may be necessary until your tortoise adjusts to the see-through glass. Russian tortoises can also be kept outside in appropriate weather. Please remember, however, that tortoises can dig and will escape under fences, and that they may be killed by raccoons, rats and other predators.

Russian tortoises require 12-14 hours of UVB light daily for good health and normal growth. We recommend the [Jungle Bob Desert Sun Mercury Vapor bulb](#). With heat, UVB, and UVA provided in one bulb, this product enables the tortoise to produce vitamin D3 within its skin.

Vitamin D3 enables the tortoise to use the calcium provided by its diet. Without adequate UVB and calcium, a debilitating and eventually fatal condition known as Metabolic Bone Disease invariably develops. Tortoises kept outdoors do not require UVB lighting, as natural sunlight meets their requirements. It is very important to change your UVB bulb every 6-8 months, as it stops producing adequate UVB at this time. If you're concerned that your bulb is not producing UVB, bring it in and we'll be happy to test it for you.

Temperatures should range from 70-82 F, with a basking site of 90-95 F and a dip to 62-65 F at night. Provide your pet with the largest home possible, so that a thermal gradient (areas of different temperatures that allow the tortoise to properly regulate its metabolism) can be established. You can reach the desired temperatures with [Jungle Bob's Basking and Night Spot Bulbs](#). Reptile Heat Pads are also useful for creating basking sites and as a night-time heat source. A great way to determine if your terrarium is at the correct temperature is to use the [Zoo Med Digital Terrarium Thermometer](#).

Although adults fare well in dry surroundings, hatchlings and juveniles should have access to a humid retreat. A Tortoise Hut stocked with moist Sphagnum Moss works very well.

The best type of substrate for Russian tortoises is cypress mulch, such as [Keeper's Choice Cypress Mulch](#), or a 6-8 inch deep mix of reptile sand and coconut husk. The substrate should be of a depth that allows the tortoise to create a shallow depression for night-time use.

Diet

Russian Tortoises will not thrive unless their diet is high in fiber and calcium and low in protein and fat. Your pet's salad should include endive, Swiss chard, mustard/collard greens, romaine and similar produce. Small amounts of yam and carrot can be provided once weekly. [Commercial Grassland Tortoise Chow](#) may be added to your tortoises' salad, but should not be used as a mainstay. Avoid spinach, iceberg lettuce, and high protein foods such as beans and dog food.

If possible, also offer pesticide-free dandelion, clover, and other native grasses and flowers (please feel free to ask us for a list of similar food sources).

Drinking water should be available in a tip-proof bowl, and your pets should also be soaked in a tub of shallow water for 15-20 minutes, 1-2x weekly.

A [calcium supplement](#) should be added to all meals provided to baby and juvenile tortoises. Vitamin/mineral supplements should be used 2-3 times each week. Both can be reduced to once weekly for well-nourished adults. A turtle calcium block may be left in the terrarium for “as needed” use.

Cleaning and Handling

The terrarium should be cleaned regularly and fecal matter removed as necessary. A monthly substrate replacement will help maintain your pet’s good health. The inside of the terrarium can be scrubbed with an appropriate reptile cage cleaner; we recommend [Natural Chemistry’s Healthy Habitat](#).

Russian Tortoises can be carefully handled on a daily basis. Always wash your hands before and after handling any animal.

Fun Fact

In parts of their natural habitat, Russian Tortoises experience winters far colder than those faced by related species. Protected by a “natural anti-freeze”, individuals in hibernation have registered body temperatures of 4 F!

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