

## **Mediterranean Tortoise Husbandry Guide**

This husbandry guide focuses on Hermann, Horsfield, and Spur-Thighed tortoises. Other species have varying needs and requirements for their care.

Tortoises in the wild are foragers, they roam good distances finding wildflowers, weeds and plants to eat. To provide the best care for your tortoises it is always good to keep this in mind. Most tortoise owners choose to have both an indoor tortoise table and an outdoor tortoise enclosure. This means tortoises can enjoy roaming outside and soaking up the sun during warm summer days.

### **Appropriate Bowls**



In any type of enclosure tortoises should be provided with a shallow water dish with something to help them reach the water. This tortoise pictured to the left has a piece of cork bark to climb on as well as having steps on the bowl. The water must always be shallower than the tortoise's head to avoid drowning.

Slate is a great choice for serving your tortoise's food on as it allows the tortoise to grind down its beak. Cuttlefish bone also is a great addition as it provides calcium and can assist in beak maintenance.

### **Tortoise Tables:**

Tortoise tables need to have a minimum length of 10x the tortoise's shell length. However, this is a minimum and tortoises will absolutely utilise and benefit from an even bigger size than this. Tortoises should be provided with a hide and various other pieces of enrichment like bridges, cork bark etc.

Recommended substrate is a 50/50 mix of coco coir and play sand. The bottom of the table should be lined with a waterproof plastic lining to avoid wood rotting and to allow for easy cleaning. Tortoises should have deep substrate on the hide end to allow them to burrow. When choosing the depth of substrate, ensure it is deep enough to burrow but not too high that the tortoise can go over the sides of the table. Some owners choose to cover the top of the table with chicken wire to avoid this.

Substrate should be spot cleaned for faeces, urates and old food daily. Full substrate changes are to be done every 8-12 weeks although can be performed more frequently if there are concerns over parasites or fungal infection.

\*\*\*\*Do not use any other sand than play or reptile sand as it can cause impactions\*\*\*\*



### **Outdoor Tortoise Enclosures:**

If your tortoise will be staying in an outdoor enclosure during the summer there needs to be a section that is secure, fox/rodent proof whilst still allowing the light and UV-B from the sun to reach the tortoise. Chicken wire is often used for the roof. As seen in this picture, this lucky tortoise has a secure place to sleep whilst having a big run for them to explore and forage in during the day.

Tortoises enjoy roaming on the lawn during summer months however it is important that roaming tortoises are never left unsupervised. Many people think tortoises are slow, however given the opportunity they can run across a garden in just a few minutes. You must also ensure the plants in your garden are tortoise safe and any that aren't are safely out of reach. Many owners choose to buy tortoise seed mixes which contain wildflowers, vegetables and weeds to grow in your tortoise's outdoor enclosure or in a separate bed.

### **UVB:**



UVB is vital for tortoises to produce vitamin D3 which promotes calcium metabolism and bone growth. If inadequate UVB is provided, tortoises are at a great risk of developing metabolic bone disease as well as other life altering (even life-threatening) diseases.

When outside in the sunshine, tortoises are receiving excellent UVB. However, when inside tortoises need to be provided with a strong UVB source of 10%. There are multiple different options for UVB but a tube as seen pictured here is most common.

The distance of the UVB tube from the tortoise is also important. Around 30-45 cm from the tortoise is recommended. The further away the UVB the less benefit the tortoise will get.

UVB also needs to be replaced every 6-12 months depending on the manufacturer instructions and UVB type. The light strength will appear the same but over time the UVB output will decrease leading to tortoises not getting the full benefit and being at risk of developing health problems.

UVB should be set on a timer or manually turned off at night to allow for the tortoise to have a natural day/night cycle. 12 hours of UVB a day is ideal.

### **Heating:**



Tortoises are 'ectothermic' meaning their temperature is regulated by their environmental temperature. We need to provide tortoises with a temperature gradient within the enclosure that allows the tortoise to regulate itself. This is usually achieved by a basking lamp over the tortoise table that is controlled with a thermostat. This basking spot should be around 27 degrees celcius. The cooler end of the enclosure should be 20 degrees celcius. In between the hot and cold end of the enclosure, a gradual gradient should be achieved.

Infrared temperature sensors (pictured above) are excellent at testing the temperature gradient.

\*\*\*Any heat sources must be thermostat controlled\*\*\*

### **Humidity:**

Tortoises need a relatively low humidity of 25-50%. A digital hygrometer can be placed within the enclosure to keep an eye on this. Usually, the water dish and substrate will be sufficient to maintain this humidity without the need for frequent misting.

### **Bathing:**

Tortoises benefit greatly from regular bathing. Many owners will have a washing up bowl that is used just for the tortoise. The bowl can be shallowly filled with warm water (around 25 degrees celcius) and the tortoise placed inside to bathe. The water should be shallow enough for the tortoise to comfortably keep their head above water. Bathing will often stimulate the tortoise to defecate, they also may drink the water. Some tortoises enjoy baths more than others. Bathing is essential pre and post hibernation but tortoises benefit from bathing all throughout the year.