

Bearded Dragon Care Sheet

Bearded Dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) are very popular in the pet trade due to their tame dispositions and unique personalities. They are docile by nature making them an excellent lizard for beginners or households with children.

Bearded dragons belong to the Old World family of lizards, Agamid. Together they are members of the genus *Pogona*, a group of terrestrial and semi arboreal lizards found throughout most parts of Australia and New Guinea. There are seven species of bearded dragons: inland or central (*Pogona vitticeps*), common (*Pogona barbata*), (*Pogona microlepidota*) [no common name], western (*Pogona minima*), dwarf (*Pogona minor*), northwest (*Pogona mitchelli*) and Nullarbor (*Pogona nullarbor*). They range through nearly all of Australia except the extreme north.

Bearded dragons, also known as Beardies or BDs, enjoy being held and scratched as well as exploring their environments.

Many colors are available from vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows to browns and snow white.

As more is learned about proper care of beardies, their life spans are increased in captive care. With proper care they may live 10-12 years or more.

Habitat – Inland bearded dragons inhabit areas from open woodlands to arid scrub and desert regions located in Australia's interior. They spend a good deal of time perched on bushes, logs, rocks and structures like fence posts, scanning their territories for food and other bearded dragons. They bask in the sun during mornings and afternoons.

Length and Weight – Inland bearded dragons average 18-22 inches (46-56 cm) from snout to tip of tail. Average weight is about 10-18 ounces (283-510 gr). Males are generally larger than females. Although smaller in overall size, however, females are stockier than males.

Diet - In the wild – Inland bearded dragons are omnivorous, and eat a variety of animal and plant materials. These include insects and other small animals they can overpower, plus occasionally fruits, leaves and flowers.

Diet - At your home – We feed at 10am (bugs), 2pm (salad), and 6pm (bugs). Hornworms, Silkworms, or Dubia Roaches, and greens are given daily. You can use crickets- however we don't. Superworm are given to adults, NOT juveniles. The bugs provide the necessary protein they need. Dust bugs with calcium (if you don't use the Neo-Calglucon) and a multivitamin. **DO NOT** use iceberg lettuce or any cabbage base greens such as cabbage, broccoli, ect. Ready bagged "Spring Mix" is available in your grocery salad section. Or use Dandelion, green leaf, red leaf, arugula, romaine lettuce, collard greens, mustard greens, ect. (See Veggie List). Waxworms can be given on once weekly occasion as treats. WATERBOWLS NEED TO BE PROVIDED! THEY ARE ALREADY TRAINED FOR DRINKING FROM THEM!

Housing – Male dragons MUST be housed alone. SOMETIMES two female dragons can be housed together. A pair of male and female dragons can NEVER be housed together. Young Beardies fewer than 10 inches in length can be housed in a 20gal long aquarium. This will last them for a few months only though as they grow quickly. Adult Dragons should be housed in nothing smaller than a 40gal breeder tank. I prefer using 55gal aquariums due to the extra length it gives them to run and they are easily found at most Pet stores. Screen lids should be used for the top of any aquarium style cages you use. Do not use glass, Plexiglas or wood to cover your cages. This will not allow enough air circulation and will also trap humidity in the cage. Screen tops allow air flow, allow your lighting and heat sources to work correctly and also allow humidity to escape.

Lighting – Bearded Dragons require full spectrum UVB lighting for 12 hours a day. We do 9am to 9pm here. It is best to put your dragon's lights on a timer. I recommend and use the Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 - 18" fluorescent bulbs for juveniles and Zoo Med Powersun Mercury Vapor 100watt bulbs for adults. These fluorescent bulbs should stretch the length of your Beardies enclosure and your dragon should be able to come within 6-8 inches of the light. The UV light should be placed over the cage and **not directed through the glass**, glass will deflect the UV rays. Bulbs need to be replaced at least every 6 – 12 above this even in the winter. If you can't keep your temps above this you may want to consider buying an under tank heater (UTH) for nighttime use. Using this just during the evening hours will help create a warm spot for your Dragon to sleep. **DO NOT** use heat rocks as these can cause serious burns on your animal's underside. A thermometer on the "hot side" and one on the "cool side" will make sure that your temps are in the range they should be in.

Cage Accessories – Children's play sand is also a good floor cover, rinse until all the dust is removed and let dry before putting into the cage.. You need to provide your beardie with a driftwood stick or store bought stick to bask on. **DO NOT** use a outside limb from your yard with bark on it. Be sure to disinfect all items in the cage with 1/10 part bleach water. I also use bowls with slick inside for the bugs and salad. You can buy the ceramic "dog bowls" at the dollar store or pet store. Use some type of rough surface bowl for water so the crickets can climb out. Make sure to change the water daily. I use a Brita water filter for all the water given to my reptiles.

Head Bobbing, Arm Waving, & Other Behaviors – Inland bearded dragons have broad, triangular (arrow-shaped) heads, varying size body scales and rather short tails. Males have a much broader head than females. The "beard" in its name comes from the flared-out throat that looks like a beard. Scales along the side of their head, throat and side of their bodies have evolved into rather soft spines. Coloration varies among the different races of the inland bearded dragons, from uniform tan to chocolate brown. The males' beard tends to be darker than the females. They may have a variety of chevron patterns down their backs, and different hues to the head, throat and tail.

Bearded dragons make amusing pets. Juvenile inland bearded dragons express subservience toward larger, more aggressive inland bearded dragons by standing on three legs and waving their other limb in slow circles, bring it down and doing the same with the other leg. Males normally discontinue arm-waving as they reach maturity, but females will continue to "wave" toward aggressive males during the breeding season and while copulating.

When threatened by another inland bearded dragon or a possible predator, an inland bearded dragon will challenge the intruder by head-bobbing, flattening out its body, flaring out its throat and displaying the colorful lining of its gaping mouth. During combat, two inland bearded dragons will circle one another, mouths open, hissing and trying to bite the other's tail to drive away intruders.

While shedding, your dragon might puff up his neck repeatedly, or bulge his eyes to help remove the shed. Dragons can also puff up their bodies, or flatten out like a pancake. They generally flatten out when they are trying to warm up (more surface area).

If you take them outside on warm days, you may notice a drastic color change. As with many lizards, they will be darker when cold and lighter when warm (dark colors absorb more heat).

Bearded dragons also tend to sleep in some very odd positions, sometimes leaned up against the cage side, maybe resting on their tail rather than back legs.

Dragons are lazy! Rather than moving to the cooler end of the cage when they are too warm, many times they

will just stay put and 'gape' (leave mouth hanging open) to cool down. Assuming you are measuring your temps properly, this is nothing to worry about.

Shedding – Adult bearded dragons will shed 1 - 2 times/year in sections rather than full body sheds. Weekly baths and daily misting help not only with shedding, but to keep them hydrated as well. Babies in particular should be misted a few times a day as they dehydrate easily.

Bathing – It is recommended to provide a bath once per week. I bathe in the bathtub in the winter and a kiddie pool in the summer. Don't fill the water level too high. Particularly for babies, as some beardies will fall asleep and possibly drown in the tub. They tend to sleep almost immediately at lights out, and are heavy sleepers. When bathing, the water level should be shallow to allow the dragon to stand up out of the water, and should feel of neutral temperature to you, if it feels hot to your hand, it is too hot for your dragon.

Dehydration & Impaction – If your bearded dragons' skin appears wrinkled, the two fat pads on his head seem sunken in or flat, eyes seem like they have dark circles, this is a sign of dehydration, and he should be given a bath.

Baths are useful also if your dragon appears to be slightly impacted (hasn't been pooping regularly). In this case provide daily baths and perhaps add a few drops of vegetable oil to help move things along. If this doesn't help after a few days see a vet.

Brumation – Many BDs over 2 years of age (in some cases, even younger) will brumate, or hibernate, during the winter months, especially males. Some will sleep on and off getting up to eat or bask occasionally, and others go down hard, not waking for several months. If your dragon seems ready to brumate in the winter, it is a good idea to make a vet visit for a fecal check, especially if you're not accustomed to this behavior, or are unsure of your dragons' health. Give the dragon a bath to make sure he poops before you put it down to sleep so food isn't sitting in his belly during brumation. At this time, the lights can be turned to a shorter cycle (to match the outdoor lighting cycle) and ambient heat reduced slightly. I recommend leaving the UV light on in case they do decide to go warm up, or eat and need to digest the food. Unless your dragon is truly down for the count, it is a good idea to continue offering salads daily.

Reproduction – Inland bearded dragons reach sexual maturity at 1 to 2 years of age. During courtship, a male will indicate his interest by rapidly bobbing his head. If the female is receptive to the male's overture, she will begin to bob her head, but at a slower rate. During copulation, a male's throat area "beard" will visibly darken to nearly black, while a female's throat darkens to a lesser extent. The males bite the back of the head line to hold the females down. It all lasts about 10 seconds. Females normally lay clutches of 15-25 eggs in shallow nests dug into sandy soil within 4-6 weeks. Hatchlings arrive within 3 months in an incubator. They weigh about .07 ounces (2 gr) at birth and average 4 inches (10 cm) in length. Young usually eat you out of house and home and grow rapidly and gain adult size within a year. I **DO NOT recommend you breed your dragons without doing extensive research first.**