

Responsible Reptile Selection & Husbandry: A Client Handout

Humans have enjoyed the companionship of their four-footed friends for centuries. Part of Banfield, The Pet Hospital's vision is to educate Pet Parents on how better Pet care will maximize the life of their Pet as well as their own. Pets are members of the family and it is Banfield's pleasure and honor to treat your family member. This handout is intended to educate Pet Parents about *Reptiles* and will outline some of the specific care requirements they require.

What is a reptile?

Reptiles can be found on land and water. They breathe air through lungs and have skin covered with scales. If they have legs they are short and designed for crawling. Reptiles include a wide variety of animals such as turtles, snakes, and lizards. Reptiles can be very large (such as crocodiles). They also can be very small (such as a gecko). Reptiles are poikilothermic (cold blooded) which means they can not regulate their own body temperature.

Are reptiles hard to keep?

Keeping any Pet is a huge responsibility. Reptiles require very specific husbandry (care, food, shelter). The key to keeping your reptile healthy is to provide an environment close to that species' natural environment, including temperature range, humidity level, light cycle, and landscape. Proper nutrition is also essential. The resources on this handout can be used as a

guide. Your Banfield team is your best resource if you have questions about your reptile. *The majority of reptile health concerns can be avoided by having the proper enclosure, diet and ensuring the reptile's environment is clean.*

How do I go about choosing a HEALTHY REPTILE that will be a good fit for my family?

Do your research and buy from a reputable source, such as PetSmart, a well-established breeder or a reptile specialty shop. Talk with your Banfield doctor about your family's lifestyle and what reptiles might be a good fit for you. Talk with friends and family members about Pet reptiles they've encountered and the husbandry that's needed. Key things to keep in mind are:

- **Life span:** Tortoises for example can end up in people's wills – Are you ready for 20+ years of companionship?
- **Temperament:** Some reptiles enjoy being handled and will respond to their Pet Parents.

- **Final size!** This is especially important with snakes who can quickly outgrow their homes.
- **Diet:** All reptiles require a specific, yet diverse diet. Some are carnivorous and require meat to eat. If you're squeamish, a carnivorous reptile may not be the best Pet for you.
- **Enclosures:** Enclosures need to be outfitted with the proper heating/humidity zones. Some enclosures that are necessary for some reptiles can be quite expensive, or difficult to clean, while others are quite simple to maintain.
- **Your home:** Some rentals do not allow reptiles. Do your research.

Purchasing Tips

- Only buy reptiles that were born in captivity.
- Do not buy hatchlings or very small babies. They are very

delicate and can be difficult to care for.

- Choose a reptile that is active and alert. If possible, watch the

Pet as it is fed. If that is not possible, ask to see its records to determine when it was fed and whether it is eating. Do not buy from that source if such records are missing or you are not allowed to observe the reptile being fed.

- Make sure the reptile has been housed properly and fed the proper diet. A bad start in life can cause health problems later on.

Minimum Enclosure Size Requirements*

For Herbivorous (plant eaters)

and Omnivores*

Fruits and Vegetables That Can Be Fed

Species

Lizards

Snakes

Aquatic and semi-aquatic turtles/terrapins

Tortoises

Minimum Dimension Requirement

Length: 3x snout-to-tail length

Depth: 2x snout-to-tail length

Height (terrestrial (ground living)): 1.5x snout-to-tail length Height (arboreal (tree living)): 3x snout-to-tail length Length: 1x adult snake's total length

Depth: $\frac{2}{3}$ x adult snake's total length

Height (terrestrial): $\frac{3}{4}$ x adult snake's total length

Height (arboreal): 1x adult snake's total length

Length: 5x carapace (shell) length for aquatic species

For semi-aquatic species $\frac{1}{3}$ of total cage length should be land Water height: 2x carapace length

Total height; 2x carapace length plus 12 inches

Length: 5x carapace length

Depth: 4x carapace length

Height: 2x carapace length

*Items offered should not be limited to this list. A variety of fruits and vegetables should be provided. **Omnivores must be fed prey items as well to stay healthy.**

Can a reptile be harmful to my family?

All reptiles are potential carriers of zoonotic diseases (disease capable of being spread from animals to people) such as salmonella. Pregnant women, young children and those with compromised immune systems (cancer patients, AIDS patients, chronically diseased) should avoid contact with reptiles. Some things you can do to ensure you keep your reptile and family healthy are:

- Buy only captive bred reptiles.
- Immediately wash your hands with soap after handling a reptile, its enclosure, or accessories.
- Wear gloves and a mask when cleaning a reptile's enclosure.
- Do not kiss a reptile or let it "kiss" you.
- Do not clean your reptile's enclosure or accessories in a food-preparation area..
- Do not bathe your reptile in the family bathtub or sink. They prefer their own water space.
- If bitten or scratched by a reptile, thoroughly clean the affected area with a disinfectant and hot water and consult your physician.

- Have reptiles examined by a veterinarian twice a year.
If you have any questions or concerns about the health of your Pet, please contact your Banfield doctor.

Apples Broccoli Mustard greens Parsley
Squash Zucchini

Bananas Carrots
Okra
Peas
Sweet potatoes

Bok choy
Kale

Papaya Sprouts Turnip greens

**Sizes listed are the minimum. Enclosures should be as large as possible. For Carnivores (meat eaters) &*

Omnivores (meat & vegetable eaters)

Commonly Available Prey Items That Can Be Fed

Vertebrate – *Have a vertebral column (backbone)*

Chickens Guinea pigs R rabbits

Fish (numerous species) Mice
Rats

Gerbils Quail

Fruit flies Night crawlers Sweetworms

Invertebrate – *No vertebral column*

Crickets Hissing roaches Silkworms Waxworms

Earthworms Mealworms Super worms

These items are usually available at PetSmart, specialty Pet stores or through many Internet-based companies. Most prey items are available live, frozen, or pre-killed. Some species respond better to live food. A variety of prey items should be provided. \