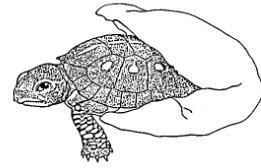


Baby Box Turtles



Your baby box turtles will arrive either as a surprise after the first rainfall of the season or you will find them when you dig down **VERY CAREFULLY** with your fingertips to see if the eggs have hatched. (Wait at least 100 days outdoors.) Sometimes the babies will pop up out of the ground in the springtime so be very watchful. If you incubate them artificially, eggs can hatch in 60 to 77 days.

HOUSING: Set up a 5 or even a 10 gallon aquarium with a light. Thrift shops and garage sales usually have aquariums available at a low price. If the glass is cracked it doesn't matter because you are not filling it with water. It is important to keep them on moist soil. In the past, there were many deaths and I discovered it was due to the fact that the turtles were not getting enough humidity and they would simply dry up like a potato chip. It was very sad indeed. Any soil will do as long as it does not have a lot of wood chips or perlite in it. SuperSoil seems to be a good soil to purchase. All turtles like to and need to hide, so provide a place for them to do so by using a small tissue box with a hole cut into the side or you can fashion a simple wooden house for them. Never use Astroturf to line the aquarium because it is extremely abrasive to the babies plastron's and feet and can cause bleeding.

Other containers are equally as good such as plastic sweater boxes and even Tupperware containers. There should be a light overhead though which is easy if you are using an aquarium. If you are using a plastic container, you can simply put a stiff piece of hardware cloth over the top and place the light onto that. You could also use a clamp on light for warmth during the day.

FOODS: The babies will eat canned dog food (canned cat food seems to deform their shells), pill bugs, mealworms, redworms, crickets, slugs, small snails (anything that moves!) and cooked chicken and turkey. You can also offer bits of lettuce, raw corn, bananas, peaches, cantaloupe and strawberries to round out their diets. Sometimes they are quite fussy but don't be discouraged. If they do not like worms today, well, perhaps tomorrow???? With the damp soil as a substrate, you can easily add worms and mealworms which will multiply and in effect, provide food all of the time. As a club member once said, "It's like living in a deli!"

MAINTENANCE: During the first winter, if your house is kept cold (68 degrees F. or lower) please keep the overhead light on all day and use a heating pad set on low all of the time. Our cable TV boxes are also warm all of the time and I utilize mine often. A cold turtle will not and should not eat. They cannot digest their food when they are cold. Visit your local garden nursery for other soil heating ideas. It's best to leave the overhead light off at night so the turtles become accustomed to the difference between day and night.

ILLNESSES: All box turtles are prone to swollen eyes which is said to be due to a Vitamin A deficiency. At these times, keep the

baby extra warm (86 to 90 degrees F.) and give him a warm bath each day with some Vitamin A drops added to the water. Recently information has come through stating that it really helps if you drop the Vitamin A right onto the eyes. I've tried it and it works. Water should be up to the turtle's nose, no deeper. "Drop A Day" multivitamins for birds by Geisler is a good water-soluble solution. Soak the turtle in the vitamin enriched water for about an hour (longer in summer) a day and wipe the eyes with a weak salt-water solution several times a day using a Q-tip.

FINALLY: Enjoy your little babies. Put them down on a piece of paper and draw a circle around their shells and do this every month and you will be able to see how fast they are growing. Some will be more aggressive than others, so make sure that the smaller ones get enough to eat. If the turtles refuse food in late fall, you have no choice but to let them hibernate. Just keep them in a cool room and check them from time to time. Keep moist. They'll pop back up when they are ready. When you begin putting them outside for the day in the spring, please keep them safe by providing an escape-proof enclosure and cover it with chicken wire or hardware cloth so that they will not be carried off by birds, raccoons, possums, rats, dogs, cats or children. Always make sure that there is plenty of SHADE available. NEVER put them outside in an aquarium. They will be COOKED in minutes.

