

Captive Water Turtles



Water turtles are capable of living a long and healthy life in captivity. The following information will help you to achieve that goal. Most important to remember is to wash your hands each and every time you touch your turtle. Even though a turtle is healthy, many organisms can be carried by him and be transmitted to you.

Unless you have a NATIVE turtle, you are dealing with a turtle that is not naturally from your particular area. I am writing this in northern California and realize that many of you are reading it from different parts of the USA and beyond and I want to give you the best information that I can. Please adjust the information to your own climate.

HOUSING: Larger water turtles, unless they are from a tropical area, may be safely kept outside all year. In very cold climates, however, they must be protected against freezing. Of course, a natural pond is best but a child's wading pool is second best. Place it under a tree where it will get at least two full hours of sunshine a day. Fill nearly 1/2 full with water and put a smooth log or two in the center so that the turtle may climb out and get completely dry when it wants to. If you can put the pool on a slant so that there is a shallow and deep end, that's the best set-up for the turtle. For protection and hiding, find an old (or new)

plastic pail and cut it down to about 15 inches high or so. Turn it upside down and cut out a doorway and place it into the pool so that the turtle can hide and sleep and escape the hot sun. NOTE: This is not a good arrangement for breeding because turtles like to bury their eggs in the soil around the pond. If the eggs are laid in the water, the turtle will EAT them.

TURTLES CAN ONLY EAT UNDER WATER. They will eat almost anything. Use the following list as a guide: cat chow, trout chow, chicken and turkey (cooked), chopped smelt and all other kinds of fish with the bones, occasional shrimp, beef heart, cube steak, nightcrawlers, mealworms, bugs, snails and liver. Vitamins such as Avitron and "Drop A Day" by Geisler can be used to prevent illness but use sparingly. Some turtles enjoy lettuce and you can float a leaf on top of the water as often as desired. Other fruits and vegetables can be tried but turtles are basically meat eaters.

Turtles enjoy nibbling on calcium blocks. You can make your own by mixing 2 cups of plaster of paris with 1 cup of water (I also add three tablespoons of crushed eggshells) in a dish until creamy. Pour mixture into plastic egg cartons and let harden for at least a week. Then pop out and serve.

ILLNESSES: Basking at night is sometimes the first sign of illness. The turtle's eyes may be swollen shut and his nose may be wet. Bring him into the house and keep him warm. A few drops of vitamins daily will help. To open his mouth, tug on a front leg. If this doesn't work, rub your fingernail or a non-sharp object along the side of his mouth. If nothing works, add the vitamins to

the water and let him soak in it. Antibiotics for birds, available in pet shops, may help. Use one pill a day. Use any ophthalmic ointment three times a day in the eyes if they are swollen. Some salt in the water will help prevent fungus and shell-rot. Keep some Gentian Violet 2% or Betadine solution on hand in case fungus or shell rot develops.

HIBERNATION: Water turtles (not from tropical areas) kept in ponds, may be left there to hibernate naturally which is usually under the water but sometimes in mud or leaves outside of the pond area. Make sure there is plenty of mulch over the turtles so they will be below the frost line. Turtles in wading pools, etc., in somewhat warmer climates where it does not regularly freeze, may be safely left to hibernate in the following manner: When the turtle stops eating and appears sluggish (October or November), do not drain the water out of the pool. Leave at least A FOOT or more of water in there. If possible, cover the pool with another pool or place a board across most of the top to keep it dark and cool. In areas prone to freezing weather, pile dirt and/or leaves and grass clippings around the outside of the pool to insulate it. Do not bring your turtles indoors if they are suddenly frozen under the ice. Outdoors, they have a 99% survival rate. If brought indoors at this time, their survival rate drops to zero.

REMEMBER: Your turtle is not a toy! He cannot tolerate stress. He must be protected from children as well as animals and birds. AQUARIUMS are meant for FISH not turtles. Feed him right,

keep things clean and natural and your turtle will probably
outlive you!

