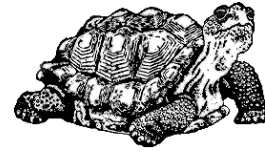


Care of Adult Desert Tortoises in Sacramento



(this sheet may also be applied to other dry land tortoises such as the Russian tortoise, however, some tortoises do NOT HIBERNATE such as the African Sulcata so do not ever let them get chilled.)

Summer Days - 85 to 105 degrees F., Low humidity, cool nights, no rain

Winter Days - 35 to 55 degrees, Can be rainy, foggy but with sunny days too

Studies have shown that it is difficult to keep a desert tortoise safe and healthy in captivity. There are basic rules to follow, precautions to be taken and sometimes even these rules don't prevent the loss of a tortoise either through death or through an open gate.

The desert tortoise originates in an area which is hot and dry in summer. They live in burrows, which are long tunnels under the ground which they dig out for themselves. During the winter they hibernate in their burrows, safe and dry and cool. In the summer they forage in the morning and then retreat into the burrows to escape the midday heat and sun, perhaps emerging again in the late afternoon.

HOUSING: The tortoise must have a DRY shelter to sleep in and to retreat into whenever he wishes to do so. Never let him sleep in a hole in the ground because our cool nights and damp clay soil will quickly bring on a respiratory illness. (Note: In the spring, a female tortoise may begin excavating a hole with her hind legs for egg laying. Do not confuse this with digging a burrow.) A small dog house is a suitable shelter. Have it slightly off of the ground and provide a wide ramp for entering and exiting. Place some dried leaves and/or grass clippings inside for the tortoise to burrow into. Make sure that the grass or leaves have not been exposed to any insecticide or fertilizer. Please do not use sand because if eaten it can impact their intestines and don't use straw because it can injure their eyes. Never use sand because it can damage their eyes and cause intestinal impaction. The shelter should be placed in a dry area, away from the sprinklers, preferably on the south side of a north wall.

FOODS: Tortoises vary in their interests in food. Tortoises MUST graze on grass and weeds. Be SURE no fertilizers or insecticides are ever used in these areas or anywhere nearby. After they graze, you may offer them a variety of foods which are listed further on down this page. You may lightly sprinkle vitamins on their food once a week which will help prevent deficiencies. Make sure the vitamin you choose contains Vitamin D3.

HIBERNATION: Sometime during October or November, depending on the weather, your tortoise will eat less, bask less and appear sluggish. This means that he is getting ready to

hibernate which is normal and healthful provided that he is in good health. Has he eaten well all summer? Does he have a good supply of fat around the shoulder and leg areas? Has his nose been dry all year? Are eyes clear? If the answer to any of these questions is "no" then do NOT let him hibernate because there is a good chance that he will die if you do. **NEVER ALLOW A SICK OR INJURED TURTLE OR TORTOISE TO HIBERNATE!**

If the answer to the above is "yes," a preferred method of hibernation in Sacramento is to allow your tortoise to sleep in your house, in a cool room around 50 degrees F. He can be placed in a box or he may be comfortable under a bed or in a cool closet. The main thing is to keep him DRY. Another, less desirable method, is to place him in a sturdy cardboard box which is full of dry leaves and/or shredded newspaper. Place this box inside of a larger box (poke holes in both boxes) and place the tortoise in the garage, up off of the floor, away from drafts and rats. Check him from time to time for a runny nose, eye problems or rat nibbles. If he becomes restless at any time during hibernation, be sure to gently take him out of hibernation because this indicates that something is going wrong. Sometimes they just need a drink of lukewarm water.

COMING OUT OF HIBERNATION: This occurs around April, sometimes earlier. You will hear the tortoise stirring in the box. You may take him outside and place him in a shady spot so that he can seek the sun at his own pace. Offer him water at this time. His appetite should return in a week or two. Bring him in at

night for awhile until the evening temperatures are warmer and the spring rains are gone. Sometimes tortoises wake up with a runny nose.

A warm bath often clears up the problem. Dry the tortoise thoroughly afterwards.

ILLNESSES: Runny noses are a serious problem and there is no quick cure. In many cases, there is no cure. We cannot advise you about exact preventative measures because even the most well tended to tortoises sometimes become ill. If your tortoise is ill or injured, he should be kept in the house. He will need a large box with a Vita-Lite (a sun substitute) overhead and a heating pad set on low underneath part of the box. The temperature should be kept at 80 to 85 degrees F. A clamp-on light with a 40 or 60 watt bulb is helpful. Give him extra vitamins at this time.

IN SUMMARY: Desert tortoises can climb over low barriers, fall over and cook in the sun in a very short period of time. They drown in pools because they cannot swim. They can poke their eyes into low growing cacti. Keep the yard free of debris such as plastic bags, baggie ties, hair (human and animal), sand, snail bait, and bug spray. They will even eat small rocks and styrofoam cups. Keep strands of bermuda grass clipped short because a tortoise can strangle in it. Dogs can and DO KILL tortoises so never leave them alone together. Painting a turtle or tortoise's shell or drilling holes in them is absolutely forbidden!

Harassment and overhandling by children as well as adults must be avoided. Move slowly around your tortoise. Stress can kill it.

And please remember that a captive tortoise can NEVER be returned to the wild.

FOODS FOR TORTOISES:

Grass, fresh/dry (a natural food), Alfalfa, Clover, Apricots, Melons, Apple (no seeds), Banana, Peas, Corn on the Cob (raw), Escarole, Zucchini, Figs, Carrots (shredded), Dichondra, Beet Greens, Oranges, Bean Sprouts (chopped fine), Dry dog and cat food (soak to soften), Dandelion, flowers and leaves, Hibiscus flowers, Mulberry leaves, Strawberries, Rose Petals, Nasturtiums, Peaches, Yellow Squash, Romaine lettuce, Endive, Kale, Green Beans, Broccoli, Cabbage (not too much), Turnip greens, Avocados, Frozen mixed vegetables (thawed), Cauliflower, Plums.

