

Taking Care of Your Bearded Dragon

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Dragon General Information

Before purchasing a bearded dragon, please do research. Read my care sheets and any others you can find. Gather all points of view to find what will work for you and your dragon. I suggest after reading my care sheets, you start with ReptileRooms.com's care sheets. They are from varied sources and carry more in-depth information on a variety of subjects. You'll find in your search that I agree with some advice and disagree with other advice on different sheets. I have researched and experimented to identify what works for me and my dragons. I advise that you print out various care sheets and info to keep in a file for future reference.

Bearded dragons are friendly, sociable animals. Once you get their home set up correctly, they are not expensive to maintain. Bearded dragons make great pets for all ages. Even small children love to watch them in their homes.

Find a good reptile vet in your area before purchasing your dragon so you are prepared in case you need one. I suggest waiting for about a month before taking your new dragon for its first vet check-up, unless it shows signs of illness. The reason for this is simple. Traveling and change of habitat are very stressful to your dragon. Stress raises the normal levels of bacteria in your dragon. Let your dragon adjust to its new home and you, give it a chance to calm down and control the levels naturally. This way they get back to normal on their own without the use of medications, which can be hard on your dragon's system.

Some dragons will refuse to eat right after you receive them. Others may eat right away. Don't panic like I did, this is normal. Just offer food daily and you'll find one day they'll suddenly begin to eat when they are comfortable. Think about this. Someone you trust puts you into a strange place and then it goes dark. You think okay, let's rest and sleep, I trust them. But then you get awakened by bumping and jostling and there you are in that dark strange place wondering what the hell is going on? The bumping

stops and then you see light. There looking at you is a stranger you don't know and everything around you is different and not familiar. Would you not be afraid, confused, stressed and uncomfortable? So be patient when you first get your dragon and let them learn to trust you.

Try not to handle your new dragon more than necessary for the first week or so. Let them adjust to their new home first and then as they settle, start letting them adjust to you. They'll learn to love you as you will love them.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns; whether you purchased a dragon from me or someone else. I love dragons and enjoy talking about them with others who also have a passion for them. No question is stupid or dumb. But you cannot learn without asking. I am not implying I know everything, I don't. But if I don't have an answer I'll help you find the information you need.

Dragon Housing

Babies up to 12" long; nose to tail

It is suggested to use a 10 to 30 gallon tank for small dragons. If you already have a larger tank then it can be partitioned off to make a smaller space for the small dragon until it gains size. There are several reasons that a small home is best to start with. First it makes it easier for your little one to find and catch its food. Second your little one can find its basking spot with ease. Third it makes it easier for you to catch the left over food and remove them before bedtime.

It is also suggested that you keep your young dragon's home simple. Just a basking rock or limb, maybe a hammock. This gives the dragon's food less places to hide so your dragon can catch it. Also this way your dragon can find its basking spot with ease; getting the heat and UVB light it needs to process its food. You do not want to provide your young one with places to hide initially, for they may chose them instead of basking in the light needed for growth. So with a small area and not too many items in the home your dragon can get all it needs and not feel overwhelmed. Tanks should be longer rather than higher to provide the most footpath you can for your pet.

Juveniles, 12" or longer and Adults

The larger the footpath and space you can give your dragon the better once they reach this size. They should have a minimum 40 gallon tank to live in, preferably 50 - 60 gallon size. Glass tanks are fine, however to be sure not to use wood, plastic or any other solid material for the top. Screen is the best for ventilation and allowing the most light possible into the home. You don't want to allow too much humidity in the home as it is not healthy for your dragon.

You can find screen tops at most pet stores and online at some of the suggested sites listed on the website Supplier Page. If the size you need is not available it is simple to

make your own. Any home improvement store carries mesh or wire screen and wood molding. They are also happy to cut them to size for you, so take the measurement of your tank with you. Once you have what you need, it is easy to put together with nails, staples or glue so that it will set on the top of your tank. Just make sure that if you use glue, time is allowed for drying and for all of the fumes to dissipate.

Building your own enclosures is also an option; using plexi-glass, wood and screen. I built some of mine. Some people think dragons do better with limited sight. I think they are right with young dragons but my adult girls seem to enjoy being able to see out all around their homes. I think it is part of what makes my dragons so social and accepting of people. Boys however get very stress being able to see other dragons; either they want to fight if seeing a boy or breed if seeing a girl. So for my boys I purchased Designer Showcase Cages. They are very functional, while being easy to clean. They're stackable for saving space and still allow the boys to be able to see out of the front. The link to their site is on the website Supplier Page.

I have included a couple of pictures of the enclosures I built and one of the Designer Showcases. If you are interested in building your own just email me and I will help with specifics.

When housing small dragons, they can be grouped together. But once they reach a sexable age, males should be moved out and housed alone. Females can normally be housed together as long as you are sure they're each provided a place to bask. Also make sure they are close to the same size. Smaller dragons will not eat or will eat very little, if housed with larger dragons. They have a social structure of dominate and submissive. You have to make sure the home is large enough for those housed there. No more than two girls in a 55-60 gallon tank is my suggestion. I think if the girls live together from the time they are young, as they grow older they will keep living together with ease. If you are going to add an adult girl in with another, watch them. Make sure they are not head bobbing at each other or that one does not go hide, not coming out.

If this happens they will need to be housed separately.

If you don't provide a basking area for each dragon they will pile onto each other under the one provided. When this happens the girl on bottom is not receiving the heat and light she needs to be healthy.

I always say if in doubt, ask questions and go with the safer option for your dragon's sake.

Lighting and Heating

Lighting and heating are very important to your dragon. Your dragon's health and well-being depend on good lighting and enough heat.

Natural Sunlight Outdoors

This is the best for your dragon, even if you can only provide a small amount it helps. Your dragon needs UVB rays to process its food. I use 40 gallon plastic tubs which can be purchased at your local discount store for about \$10 each. They are high enough your dragon can't climb out so you don't have to get a cover for it. Unless you have other animals around that may wish your dragon for dinner. I place a single layer of paper towels on the bottom of the tub. Try to position the tub so there is a shaded area for your dragon to cool as well as a sunny area for basking, If you don't have a safe place like that, then use the lid the tub comes with, place it sideways over 1/4 -1/2 of the tub to create shade. I personally take all of my dragons outside 3 to 4 times a week to bask in their tubs on my back deck. (photo provided). I place them out from either 10am to 1pm or from 3 pm until 6 or 7pm. I try to avoid the hottest part of the day as I have found they get very restless during that time and seem to enjoy mornings and late afternoons better, relaxing and basking in the sun. I always mist the dragons with water while they are basking; about once an hour to help them stay hydrated in the heat. You'll find they will often open their mouths and flick out their tongues to drink during misting.

Enclosure Lighting and Heating

Your dragon has to have UVB rays to produce vitamin D-3. You'll also need to use supplements containing D-3 and that is covered in the Supplements and Diet section. However, nothing fully replaces your dragon being able to naturally produce what it needs.

There are two ways to light and heat your dragon's home. I use both ways depending

on the home and what the dragon responds to best. I tried a lot of different things to begin with until I found what works best for me and my dragons. I suggest you research to find what you are satisfied with.

Mercury Vapor Bulbs

These provide both UVB light and heat all in one bulb. They seem expensive, but if you consider you're purchasing one bulb and one fixture instead of two of each, the price is comparable. I tried several different Mercury Vapor Bulbs and have found the best to be 160 watt Mega Ray bulbs. They last longer; losing their power slower than others. A supplier for the bulbs is listed on the website Supplier Page. You'll need one 10" silver dome fixture with a ceramic socket. They are found at any home improvement store for about \$12.

Florescent tube bulbs and heat bulbs or emitters

Florescent bulbs produce just UVB light and not heat, so using these means you'll also have to have a heat source. The florescent bulb should run the full length of your enclosure; the heat source needs to be at one end or the other. Your dragon needs a basking spot as well as an area to cool down. I use Repti-Sun 10.0 for florescent bulbs and Med-Zoo 100 or 150 watt bulbs for heat. The cheapest places to find the bulbs and fixtures are listed on the website Supplier Page. You'll need to change these bulbs every six months as they lose their strength over time and become useless to your dragon.

You'll need a gauge to help you keep the enclosure temperatures regulated. Young dragons need a slightly higher temperature in their basking spot than adults. Young dragons need the temperature in the basking area to be 110-120 degrees and adults need 105-110 degrees. The other end for their cool area needs to be 80-85 degrees. Dragons need to be able to get close to the UVB light, between 6 - 12", the ways to achieve this are explained in the Cage Accessories section. Be sure there is always screening between the light or heat source and your dragon. This ensures your

dragon will not get burned by the light or heat source, Dragons don't process sensation like humans, so if most of their body is comfortable and one spot is being burned they are not aware of this. So it is your job to protect them from harm. Be sure you have enough basking spots for each dragon if more than one is housed in the enclosure. Otherwise someone may get left out and not receive what they need.

If your enclosure's basking spot is not hot enough with the heat bulb, you may need to add another heat source. Heat emitters work well. Also Zoo-Med makes heat pads that can be placed under or on the sides of your enclosure if it's glass. There are also heat rocks. A lot of people now advise not to use them, as they have been known to burn dragons. They did at times when they were first introduced and then the company improved them. I used them for a while and had no problems, but I checked the rocks often. My problem with them was the fact my dragons got lazy, they would not move up to the UVB light or play. They just laid on the rocks all day and I felt that was not good for them.

Putting your lights on timers is the best. I started by turning mine on and off every day and night, but sometimes life gets busy and you miss the time you scheduled. Your dragon needs a routine. So for the price of a timer (about \$10) it makes your life easier and your dragon's life happier. I change my lighting times with the seasons to keep the dragons routine in sync with the natural passing of the year. I keep my lights set to come on at 7am each morning. In the summer my lights are set to go off at 9 pm this gives the dragon 14 hours of light and coincides with the sunrise and sunset. As fall comes around October I begin to slowly move the off time back as the days get shorter. I chose the time every two weeks so the dragons have time to adjust to each change. I'll go from 9pm to 8pm then two weeks later go from 8pm to 7pm and so on until I get to 5pm. This reverses the daylight and dark hours just as it does naturally between summer and winter. Come November they'll have 10 hours of daylight and 14 hours of dark. This will also help your dragon brumate which is an important cycle for your dragon, especially if you plan to breed. Brumation is covered in its own section, so

read that for more information on the subject. In February I start to reverse the lighting back towards summer time. As you do, your dragon will begin to be more active as they would in their natural habitat.

I can't express strongly enough how important lighting and heat are to your dragon. Your dragon can't function properly and be healthy without the proper heat and light. So if you have any questions please ask.

Substrates

Everyone has their own opinion about this as in most other areas. However everyone does seem to mostly agree on a few things.

What NOT to use as they are dangerous and deadly for your dragon.

- 1) Chippings or mulch from wood or bark
- 2) Corn cob granules
- 3) Any reptile sands
- 4) Calci-sand or any sand stating that it has calcium in it
- 5) Walnut shells
- 6) Gravel
- 7) Kitty litter

These things lead to impaction which can cause the death of your dragon.

There are two sides on the use of Play Sand. Some people advise never to use it, others including me think it is okay for dragons over 12" long. If you chose to use Play Sand be sure to purchase a strainer and sift the sand before putting it into your dragon's home. Even Play Sand has some small pebbles in it and those need to be removed. I like the Play Sand for several reasons. It is cheap to purchase and easy to maintain; as you just scoop the poop out each day to help keep the home clean. Also most of my dragons enjoy digging a sleeping place or cooling place in the sand. Just watch your dragons, I have never had one get impacted from Play Sand, but according to others there is a chance. Be sure your dragon is having fecal movements regularly and that they are not bloating up; as otherwise can be signs of impaction. I have one girl who when placed on sand just would not stop digging, she dug all day continuously so now she is back on paper towels. Every dragon is different.

Some move their dragons to a separate feeding place, so they do not ingest sand when eating. Or they separate out an area from the sand, using a shallow pan and

place the food there away from the sand. If you chose to use a separate place to feed a 40 gallon Rubbermaid or Sterilite tub works great. However, if your dragon will not eat when moved it may be getting too stressed from being in a different place. Don't let your dragon go hungry. If they refuse to eat in a different place, feed them in their home.

For dragons less than 12" long or for any others you chose not to use sand with, there are several other options.

- 1) Paper towels (remember crickets can hide under these, so move them around at night before lights out to be sure you have all the crickets out of your dragon's home.
- 2) Reptile carpet (the grass-looking kind, not the looped kind as your dragon can catch a nail in the loops and harm itself)
- 3) Non-stick shelf paper
- 4) Newspaper if the ink used is not harmful. Also, the ink on the paper will turn your dragons' feet black. As with paper towels, watch for hidden crickets and remove them before lights out
- 5) Indented Kraft paper (it comes in rolls so you can cut it to size)
- 6) Brown butcher paper

There are other things that some people suggest you can use. However before using any of them, I would advise that you research them thoroughly.

Cage Accessories

I use a variety of items depending on the size of the dragon and what I find they like the best and therefore use the most. Sometimes I'll switch items out that I don't see them using and try other things, until I find a balanced home space. The following list of items is what I use combinations of. Experiment for yourself to see what you find that accomplishes filling the needs of your dragon.

1) Rocks

I use Pennsylvania field stone and flagstone; I have found they retain heat well so the dragon gets heat from the lamps above as well as the rock below. Also cement blocks work as they are course enough for your dragon to climb. They can use the top for basking and slip in the under squares to cool. I use a non-toxic paint and let them dry and air-out for a week before placing them inside a home. Some people use patio stones that can be purchased at any home improvement store. Different rocks retain and hold varied amounts of heat. I advise that before allowing your dragon to bask on the rock you chose, test it. Place a temperature gauge on the surface of the rock for a few hours and see what reading you get. Make sure the rock you use does not exceed the temperature ranges suggested for your dragon's size and age. This is covered in the Lighting and Heating section.

2) Branches or Limbs

First it is NOT safe to just grab branches or limbs from the back yard; they will carry bugs, parasites or bacteria that can be harmful to your dragon. Also any bark on the branch or limb can be ingested by your dragon and cause impaction.

There are websites that explain how to make outside branches and limbs safe to use. I don't wish to take the chance of missing something and harming one of my dragons. I purchase branches and limbs both from my local pet store and off the internet. E-bay has many suppliers listed. There are sources listed on the Supplier Page here as well.

Even when purchasing from a safe place be sure to sanitize the item before placing it into your enclosure. This process is explained in the Cleaning Your Enclosure section.

3) Hammocks

Most of my dragons enjoy hammocks. They're a safe, easy way to allow your dragon to get close enough to its light and heat sources. Hammocks are easy to clean, which is a plus. I only have a couple dragons that don't use hammocks and prefer large limbs instead. Hammocks can be purchased, or easily made if you look at the construction of those available for sale.

4) Hidey Places

Except for small dragons you will need to provide a hidey place. They use the area to cool down as well as to sleep. Dragons seem to feel safe in a closed-in area when sleeping. There are hidey items for sale however I created some of my dragon's hiding places with rocks so I get more than one benefit from the area. Just be very careful that what you create is sturdy and your dragon is not able to knock the rocks over and hurt themselves.

Keep the enclosure layout simple, avoid over crowding to allow footpath area for your dragon. Keeping it simple allows for easy cleaning, keeps your dragon's food from having too many places to hide and gives your dragon space to roam and explore in.

But sure that what you chose to use gives your dragon a place to climb and be near its heat and light source, I am emphasizing this again as it's very important to the health of your dragon.

I have included some pictures of my dragon's homes to help give you some ideas of different ways to set them up.

Cleaning Your Enclosure

I use two things to clean my enclosures:

1) Bleach water

Use a clean, one gallon milk container. Pour in one cup of bleach then fill to the top with water and shake well. Be sure you clearly mark the container as bleach, so it will not become confused with a gallon water container. Use the container to fill a spray bottle with the mixture to use for cleaning.

2) Healthy Habitat

The supplier with the best price on Healthy Habitat is listed on the Supplier Page. I purchase the one gallon jug size and use a generic spray bottle, for better economy. Healthy habitat is harmless to your dragon so can be used daily with your dragon in its home. I scoop out any poop each day, then spray the sand with Healthy Habitat to keep the smell down and kill bacteria. If your dragon has left feces on its limb or rock use a paper towel to get most of it off, then spray and wipe the surface with Healthy Habitat. If the enclosure has paper towels as a substrate, I remove the soiled ones and spray the flooring with Healthy Habitat before placing clean paper towels back inside. This helps keep the enclosure cleaner between weekly disinfections for bacteria.

Weekly cleaning of all the items in your dragon's home is vital to its health. For this I use the bleach water mixture. I remove all items from the enclosure to the kitchen sink, spraying each one thoroughly with bleach water and letting them soak for 15 minutes. While everything is soaking I remove all paper towels or sift through all of the sand for any poop, then use Healthy Habitat to clean the glass or Plexiglas and the wood or plastic insides of the enclosure. After the 15 minute soak, rinse all of the items. I rinse each one at least twice and then smell them. If you are still able to smell the bleach, rinse again until no smell of bleach is left. Dry the items before returning them to the enclosure. Make sure all of the bleach is gone and the items are dry. This is important

as you'll find your dragon flicks its tongue out and licks everything all the time. You do not want your dragon to become ill and possibly die from getting bleach into its system.

I know this all sounds like a lot, but once you get the routine down it takes only about 30 minutes. This is time well spent for your dragon to stay healthy and happy.

Dragon Feeding

I'm sharing the information I have gained and the ways I have found best for my dragons. I am not claiming to be an expert. Some friends thought I fed a diet that was too rich, as what I feed would not be available to the dragons in their natural habitat. However after visiting and meeting my "children" they reconsidered and began a mix of richer feeders for their dragons. Is the way I feed the only good way, I doubt it, but it works for me. My dragons are big, healthy and happy. My dragons are active, alert and very friendly. I suggest you read what is good and mix items until you find what works for you.

Veggies and Fruits

Some offer greens once a day removing them if the dragon does not eat them within a few minutes. Others state they offer greens two or three times a week. Six mornings I give each dragon a mix of greens, sprayed with water and dusted with Repti-Cal with D-3. The seventh morning I dust the wet greens with Herpivite Multi Vitamins. I leave the greens in until lights out at night. My vet suggested spraying the greens with water for two reasons, first it helps supply the dragons with extra water and second the supplement dust sticks to the wet greens better. The water also helps keep the greens moist and fresh longer. If I suspect a cricket or two might be hiding in the enclosure, I leave the greens overnight to give the crickets something to munch on besides the dragon.

There are those who state to just dust the worms and crickets and not the greens. I feel that I never know how much they are getting from either, so I opt to dust both.

Never use Iceberg lettuce to feed your dragon, it is all moisture but has no nutritional value. I received the following guide with one of my dragons, but don't remember which one. I have found it to be very helpful so I am sharing it with you, but can't take credit for creating it. It list greens, veggies and fruits along with the nutritional value of

each, plus how often to feed them or if you should not feed them ever. Remember to chop or grate veggies and fruits for small dragons and tear greens into dragon head-size pieces to help your dragon digest them well.

Insert List here

Insects

It is very important to never, ever feed your dragon insects that are too big for them. The rule of thumb is to feed them nothing longer than the space between their eyes. I have found this works well. The exception I think are silk worms and horn worms, as they are softer and very gushy inside, but still watch the sizes. I use a tall plastic cup to place insects into, then sprinkle the supplement and shake the cup a bit to coat all the insects inside. I use the same schedule for dusting insects as I do with greens, six days with Repti-Cal with D-3 and one day with the Herptivite Multi-vitamins.

Crickets

I use crickets for all my hatchlings and juvenile dragons. Sizing in crickets is very important, so chose a supplier who sells them by size. It is also important to check out the supplier to be sure they employ good conditions for raising the crickets. I use crickets from New York Worms. I have found them to be reliable and have good crickets. They only deliver to a few states however, so they may not be the supplier for you. New York Worms web site can be found on the supplier page. I dust my crickets every feeding with Miner-all Multi-mineral supplement. Some think this is not necessary, however with the crickets running around being chased, I worry about how much is actually left on the cricket when it is caught. So by dusting everything I feel I'm making sure they are getting some supplements everyday.

If your enclosure is simple without many places for crickets to hide, shake a few at a time in and watch to see if your dragon is chasing and eating them. If they seem to have eaten the first few, drop in a few more. I do this for 15 minutes which is the

suggested time, or until they stop chasing them to eat. If your enclosure has places for the crickets to hide, either remove the extra items until after feeding or use a separate enclosure to feed in. A Rubbermaid or Sterilite tub works well. Some dragons will dive right in and eat in a tub, others get stressed by being moved from their home and will not eat. Don't allow your dragon to starve. If the separate feeding area is not working, find a way to feed them in their home. Be sure if you are feeding in the enclosure to check and remove any extra crickets before the lights go off. Crickets will bite on your dragon as it sleeps and can cause health problems. If you can't get them all, leave something in the enclosure for the crickets to nibble on besides your dragon. Leftover salad or a small wedge of potato works.

I give Gutload to all my feeders. What your feeders eat is in turn what your dragon is eating. The more nutritional the food your dragon eats the better. I have chosen Cricket Food.com for my Gutload. They are a little more expensive than some you may find. But theirs is vet-approved and the ingredients look healthier for the dragons. I house my crickets in a 40 gallon Rubbermaid tub. I just drilled small holes in the lid for ventilation. They make critter carriers in several sizes for smaller amount of crickets. Your crickets will come in a box full of egg cartons, without them the crickets will pile onto each other and suffocate themselves. I change these egg cartons often to keep down bacteria, so I order egg cartons. The supplier for these is on the Supplier Page. I order one box and it lasts me about eight months. I sprinkle in the Gutload on the bottom of the tub then place a layer of egg cartons, then lay slices of potato onto them. Another layer of egg cartons and more potato slices. Crickets are dumb and will drown themselves in water, so the potato slices provide moisture for them. I change out the egg cartons regularly as I see the debris collecting on them. I watch as the Gutload is eaten and just add more. Keeping the crickets well fed and their home clean, are both important for the health of your dragon.

I have found that most of my dragons after becoming a year or so old, decide they don't like crickets anymore. It may be that I spoil them hand feeding them worms, but I have

had others tell me that their older dragons won't eat crickets either.

Roaches

Some use roaches instead of or along with crickets. I tried to do them. Icky, I just could not get past them being roaches. I'm not saying they are not a good feeders, just that I don't use them. They breed easily and are kept easily, but as I don't use them, I can't give you in-depth information on them. You'll have to check other care sheets on the breeders' sites who sell them.

Worms

I feed a variety of worms, which are all dusted with Miner-all. I use a small plastic bowl to put the chosen worms in, then sprinkle the supplement in and swirl the cup to coat all the worms. I choose not to use mealworms ever; they have hard, crunchy shells that make them hard for a dragon to digest. I use super worms, molted ones for the smaller dragons (super worms shed; when they do they are a white color and very soft). I get my super worms from New York Worms. I add in a mix of butter worms, hornworms, silkworms and phoenix worms. These I purchase from Mulberry Farms, they are listed on the Supplier Page. They provide good service and top quality worms. I feed a variety of these worms, but not everyday. They are very rich and can create a fat dragon which is not healthy. But mixing them in two or three times a week helps. Read the information on the different worms on the Mulberry Farms web site. It will tell you the nutritional value of each. If you have a dragon that is being picky and not eating well; offering these seems to spark their appetite. I have a couple of dragons that will refuse to eat anything but hornworms and salad; and some others that won't eat a hornworm at all. They seem to have their likes and dislikes just as we do. I use the butter worms and phoenix worms for my small dragons. They have more protein and are smaller in size so easier for the little ones to digest.

Butter worms come in a container that they remain housed in. They are kept in the fridge and will keep without any maintenance for about two months. Phoenix worms

come in containers that they are kept in. They are kept at room temperature and will also keep for about two months without any maintenance. Hornworms and silkworms can be purchased in self-contained cups that come with the food in them. If you are buying large quantities, it is cheaper to purchase the worms, food and make your own space for them. The web site explains how to do this.

Maintaining super worms is pretty easy. I use a rectangular Rubbermaid tub, I fill it about half way up with worm bedding from CricketFood.com and place potato slices randomly across the top. Replace the potato slices as you see them get eaten with holes in them. I mix up the bedding every couple of days. As you see it become more powdery, then grainy, begin replacing it. Super worms keep forever. But if you find a few dead ones at times, just remove them.

Do NOT use worms sold for fishing. They are not raised the same way and can harm your dragon. Do NOT use any worms found outside as there is no telling what they are carrying that may harm your dragon.

Pinkie Mice

I use these for my gravid females or dragons that are not eating well. Don't over feed mice, one or two a month is enough. I use the frozen ones, not the live ones.

Bearded Dragon Pellets

I don't know much about these foods as I chose not to use processed food for my dragons. I think natural foods are better, but that is just my opinion. I suggest if you chose to use them, you do research to find the best ones.

A note: I wish someone had shared this information with me to begin with. It would have saved me some worry and panic.

Dragons will eat when they are hungry unless they are sick. Offer food each day but if

your dragon does not eat for a day or two, it's okay. Some days they will eat a lot, then they may not eat for a couple of days. Young dragons eat more than older ones. Adults' systems slow down as they stop growing, so they eat less often. So just be sure what they are eating is good for them. I do keep liquid calcium, I acquired it from my vet so if I feel a dragon is not eating well or gravid (pregnant) I will supplement with it. Talk to your vet about this if you feel your dragon is not getting what it needs with feeding.

If you have a question, just email and I'll try to help. If I'm unable to, I will help you find a source for the answers you need.

Dietary Supplements

I have covered which dietary supplements I use under the Feeding section, so this is just a short guideline for making your own selections.

Chose a calcium supplement with a vitamin D-3 additive that is phosphorus-free and has only a low amount of vitamin A.

Chose a multi-vitamin that contains vitamin D-3 and is phosphorus-free.

What you chose is very important to your dragon's health. It is necessary to maintain the proper levels in your dragon's system. High levels of vitamin A will cause the calcium in your dragon to bind and not be used as needed for its health. Too little or too much of any supplement is bad. Talk to your vet about suggestions, if you have questions about what is correct.

Water and Hydration

Some people will advise not to use water dishes in your dragon's enclosure. They claim that dragons will poop in them, or the water dish will create too much humidity in the enclosure.

I use water dishes in most of my enclosures. First, anything that helps insure my dragon is pooping regularly and not becoming impacted is good for me. I just watch and dump the water, sanitize the bowl and then re-fill it. This only takes a couple of minutes and to me it is worth the time. I use stream distilled water for my dragons, since city and well water can contain chemicals that I think may be harmful to their health. It's only a dollar a gallon, so the cost is low. As for building up too much humidity, if your enclosure is well-ventilated this should not be a problem. Be sure you are not filling the water level higher than your dragon can lie in and keep its head above the water. Dragons will play in the water, lay in the water and even fall asleep in the water. Besides all that, some of my dragons will actually go drink from the dish. If you are careful, there is no reason to deny your dragon this method of staying hydrated.

Keeping your dragon hydrated is important. There are many ways to help achieve this. Misting their salads with water every day, keeps the salad fresher longer and adds to the water intake of your dragon. I personally don't feel this is always enough, so I mist my dragons two to three times a day. I picked up a small spray bottle at the dollar store and fill it each day with the distilled water. I enjoy misting my dragons; they'll lift up their heads and gape their mouths lapping at the water running off the tip of their noses. Or sometimes they will just stretch out and enjoy the feel of the cool water. You'll know when they have had enough as they'll just walk away from the spray of the water.

Baths are important also, I give weekly baths to help with hydration and keeping the dragons clean. Use lukewarm water, not hot or cold, about the temperature you would

use on a baby. Only fill the tub or sink enough so the water brushes over the sides of your dragon. Please keep an eye on your dragon while it soaks. They could possibly relax, fall asleep and drown if your water level is too high. I use a soft tooth brush to clean stains of poop and food off my dragons. Just rub softly so you don't abrade their scales. A dragon will often poop in its bath water. When this happens remove the water, clean the tub or sink and re-fill so your dragon can continue its bath. I suggest about 15 minutes of soaking each week. I have never had a dragon become impacted and I believe it is partly because of the baths and water dishes allowing them to relax and release any build-up of feces. It is fun to watch your dragon in the bath, the first bath they may be stressed and swim around a lot trying to get out. They'll adjust and begin to enjoy them with a little time, swimming gently around and lazing in the water. You'll also notice a lot of them drinking from the bath water, again helping with hydration.

Remember that your dragon is a cold blooded animal, so making sure the water is lukewarm is important.

Dragon Behaviors

The cute actions and behaviors are what make your bearded dragon such a wonderful pet. I have listed several of these behaviors, along with the reasons behind them, so you will be able to tell what your dragon is thinking.

Raised Tail

Small dragons will do this when they are stalking prey. You may also see this during breeding season in your adult dragons.

Bearding Out

I own some dragons that I have never seen beard out and others that do so regularly. Males seem to beard out more than females. The dragon will look like it's swallowing hard and will normally open its mouth, and then the area of their neck will suddenly begin to puff out and change color. Some males will head bob during this behavior as well, others will just tip and turn their head as if posing for you.

Males will beard out during the breeding season to impress the females. They'll also do so to show dominance to other dragons or when startled as a defense against attack. Alpha females will also use this gesture to other females to show dominance.

Head Bobbing

This is a display to show superiority over other dragons. Males will do this along with bearding out during the breeding season to get the female to show submission. They can sometimes bob so jerky and fast I think they are going to hurt themselves. I smile every time, though because I can almost hear the boy saying to the girl "who's your daddy". Females will sometimes do a slow motion head bob back to the males; this is showing they are bowing to the boys' dominance.

Arm Waving

This is mostly a female behavior, but can sometimes be seen in small males when

confronted with a large dragon. The females use this in response to the male bearding out and head bobbing during the breeding season. Also small females seem to do it for no apparent reason; I think they are practicing for later in life. The dragon will lift one arm and move it in a slow circle before putting it down and repeating the action with the other arm. I think it is adorable to watch. They look like beauty queens in a parade. Sometimes if more than one female is housed together one will head bob and the other will arm wave as if to be saying, "I'm friendly, let's all get along".

Brumation

Brumation is a semi-hibernation state, entered during the winter months. Dragons know food is scarce during the cold months in nature. They naturally sleep to slow their systems down and use what nutrients they have stored internally through the spring and summer to get through the winter. Some dragons will go to sleep in November and not awake at all until February. But most will awake at some point during this time. Some will not sleep at all during the winter, especially young dragons. Adults will normally sleep from a few days to a couple weeks at a time, waking to sun themselves and eat before going back to sleep. You'll have to be careful during this time to ensure your dragon is not sleeping with feces left in its intestines, as bacteria can grow as your dragon sleeps. As their systems are slowed, they are not able to fight off the bacteria's growth. Once you see your dragon is beginning to sleep more, give them a lukewarm bath to help them release any feces left. If they wake and eat be sure the next day you soak them for the 15 minutes. They'll go right back to see afterward. Doing this helps clear their intestines. If you read the Heating and Lighting section of the care sheets, it explains how to adjust the heating and lighting during the brumation period.

Don't force your dragon to brumate. Ones under a year old will slow down a bit, but probably still eat everyday. I have a couple of adult girls that eat every day all winter and don't fully brumate at all. They'll just lay around more, not being as active. Just keep your light and heat on the proper schedule and let the dragon decide what's best for it.

I always have my dragons tested every three months with a fecal test to be sure they have not gotten parasites or bacteria. I plan one in the beginning of November to be sure none of my brumating dragons are sleeping while the harmful things eat at their system; when they are not able to mount an adequate defense. No matter how careful you are, your dragon will get parasites or bacteria, so be careful during the winter to

ensure they are not infested and can sleep in perfect health.

It is always an anxious time for me during brumation, I'm worried about them and if all is well. The first year I woke them everyday, just for a moment so they would look at me. That way I would know they were okay. This is not a good thing to do and I learned that it was a natural state and to just leave them alone. But if you become worried, just email and we'll share concerns and get ourselves through it until spring time.

Dragons' Diseases and Disorders

I'm not a vet and don't claim to be an expert. The following information is here to help you identify problems and should not be used to replace a visit to the vet for treatment options. Bearded dragons are hardy animals and if you follow the instructions in these Care Sheets, you should be able to avoid most health issues. Be sure if you acquire more than one dragon, that you house any new ones separately for at least 30 days. Then take the new pet to the vet for a fecal check before you house it with others.

Calcium and Vitamin deficiencies

Not enough calcium and vitamin D-3 will cause a slow growth rate in your dragon at a minimum. It can also cause metabolic bone disease. One of the first signs of this will be seeing your dragon's hind legs twitch. This disease is fatal if not treated immediately. Caught early, enough extra supplements and natural sunlight can help. This condition is seen mostly in older dragons or young ones not receiving the supplements they need.

Vitamin A Toxicity

This is a common problem in dragons that are over supplemented. Many multi vitamins contain vitamin A, so watch the amounts carefully. Some veggies contain vitamin A, so check the chart and be careful about feeding with these too often. Symptoms start with the swelling of the throat and eyes, then continue with the bloating of the body and lethargy.

Read and learn about supplements so you are certain your dragon is getting the right amounts. Be aware of your dragon's behavior as this will let you know if things are not right, so that you can correct them quickly before causing irreversible harm.

Mites

Mites are not very common in captive-bred bearded dragons. Some pet stores don't

have the best sanitary conditions, so be careful if you purchase there. Mites are small bugs you'll normally find around the eyes first, then the mouth. There are commercial products to treat them with, but I suggest checking with your vet before using any of them.

Parasites and Bacteria

Your dragon can get parasites from several sources. Unclean enclosures, dirty insect and worm tubs and un-washed greens will create ways for your dragon to get parasites. So carefully follow the cleaning instructions. Low levels of bacteria and parasites are normal in your dragon; the key is keeping the levels low and acceptable. Some of the things that increase the levels in your dragon include: change of habitat, breeding, brumation and adding another dragon to the enclosure. Anything that stresses your dragon will possibly raise the natural levels.

I suggest not using over the counter remedies without consulting your vet first. I'm one who believes in preventive measures and take fecal samples for each dragon to the vet every three months for testing. This way if levels are high I can treat them immediately, to prevent my dragons from becoming ill.

Some signs of high levels include: weight loss, lack of appetite, runny feces and feces with a fouler than normal smell. If you notice any of these signs, take your dragon to the vet for testing and treatment. Some feel the medications can be as damaging as the parasites or bacteria. I don't treat for low levels, but I do if high levels are detected. I try my best to keep my dragons as stress free as possible to avoid having to treat them. Remedies are simple and work well. You'll need to decide for yourself what is best for you and your dragon.

Impaction

Feeding dragons food too large or feeding too many hard-shelled worms at a time can contribute to impaction. The food lodges in their digestive track and does not pass as it

should. This can cause death if not corrected quickly. Signs are tight, hard-bloated stomachs and can lead to hind legs extending straight back as though in extreme pain. They'll look paralyzed and not move. They normally will not take food often either. Watch to be sure you are seeing regular bowel movements in the enclosure. Some dragons will leave a "present" every day, others every other day. If it has been more than two days and your dragon is not brumating, then you might have a beginning problem. If your dragon changes its eating habits, or stops eating, this is also a sign. I suggest soaking the dragon in lukewarm water, this makes them relax and can help them pass large bowel movements easier. One dragon, I had to soak three times one day. My vet suggested every two hours seeing if he would have a movement without medication. The third time was the charm. Things could have been much worse if I had not been watching daily to notice he had not left feces in his home, as he had no other signs at that time. Maybe I was being overly careful, but I would prefer to be safe than sorry. If soaking does not work, contact your vet. They have medication that can help your dragon.

If you are careful about the size of your dragon's food and watch how many worms you feed at once, this should not happen often or at all. I feel giving my dragons weekly baths helps to keep them from becoming impacted or obstructed.

Remember that your dragon will bask under the lights with its hind legs stretched out behind them. This does not mean they are impacted, if your dragon can move freely then it is fine.

Respiratory Infections

Bearded dragons are hardy animals and resistant to respiratory infections, however improper living conditions can cause them. Temperatures too low for long periods of time, improper humidity or poor enclosure conditions will all contribute to respiratory infections. Make sure you are checking the enclosure regularly for correct temperatures. Be sure the enclosure is well ventilated so the humidity does not climb

too high.

Signs of the infection include gaping mouths (don't confuse this with your dragon gaping its mouth open as it basks to release heat), forced exhaling of air, lack of appetite, puffed up or bloated body and throat. If the infection progresses, mucus will show around the nostrils and mouth. This means you need to get your dragon to the vet immediately. Antibiotics are normally used to treat this infection successfully, however you'll need to determine what caused the infection and correct it.

Thermal Burns

This comes from your dragon coming into direct contact with a hot lamp or heat source. Read the Lighting and Heating section for directions on how to prevent this from happening. If it happens, most likely your dragon will get blisters. If these break open, a bigger threat than the blister itself occurs. Bacteria in the open sore will cause an infection. This will make treatment harder to accomplish and can be fatal to your dragon. If your dragon gets burns, please take it to the vet as soon as you possibly can. They'll give you the proper medications for treatment. During the time your dragon is healing, you must take extra care to keep the enclosure very clean to prevent additional bacteria from infecting the wounds.

Egg Binding

This condition is attributed to several different things. It can be biological, a malformity which does not allow enough room for the eggs to pass through. Sometimes it can be caused by eggs that are overly large or malformed making them unable to pass through the oviduct.

Improper care of your dragon will also cause egg binding. Not having a properly prepared spot with the right temperatures contributes to egg binding. Your dragon will not lay if they're not happy with the conditions. Malnutrition or dehydration can also cause egg binding. Gravid females will stop eating very well as their eggs grow. The

eggs compress their stomachs so that the dragon does not feel hungry. Ask your vet about supplementing with liquid calcium to ensure your dragon is remaining healthy during this time. Also be sure you are misting your dragon daily and giving weekly soaks to help with hydration.

If your dragon struggles and can not lay its eggs, contact your vet.

Sexing

Sexing young dragons is very hard, if not impossible. A dragon that appears to be one sex at two months may very well appear to be the other at five months. I have purchased several dragons that later turned out to be the opposite of what the breeder I purchased them from thought they were. An example is Puffette on the website Breeder page. Purchased at five months as a boy and named Puff, Puff looked like a boy to me also. However a couple of months later; boom, I have a Puffette. Not that I love her any less, but it happens. So I will not guarantee a sex, but I will promise to do my best to guess at the sex correctly.

Boys tend to have larger heads in portion to their bodies than girls. Beyond that tendency, to sex your dragon, gently hold it in one hand supporting all its legs. Lift its tail gently up. Not too far or you'll harm your dragon. Under the tail is a slit at the base, above this is where you'll look. Boys will show two humps with a small dent in the center, these are their tentacles. Girls will have one hump in the center or it will appear to be flat. Pictured are examples of a boy and a girl to help you determine the sex of your dragon more easily.