

# Basic Dragon Care Guidelines

## Housing

- Adulthood area - a minimum 36"W x 18"D x 16"H.
- Cover 3 sides (Carolina Custom Cages' Reptile Habitat Background) if using a glass tank; this will prevent eating problems due to dragon anxiety caused by reflections, other dragons or excessive visible activity.

## Lighting and heat

- ZooMed's ReptiSun 10.0 UVB straight fluorescent tube and a separate basking heat bulb. See details in **Lighting Options' section**, page 3.
- Required temps by age, basking spot area:
  - Hatchling to six months, 115 to 120 degrees
  - Six months to one year, 110 to 115 degrees
  - One year and older, 100 to 110 degrees
- Cool side area for all ages should be around 80 degrees

## Substrate

- Paper towels, butcher paper, kraft paper or Carolina Custom Cages' Reptile Carpet (felt-like material made from recycled plastic bottles, machine washable).
- **We do not recommend sand**; well-known risk of impaction, especially with young dragons. There is also an additional risk of eye abrasions for all dragons.

## Accessories

- Dragons until they are at least 12" long need a simple habitat. Give them nowhere to hide from their necessary UVB exposure and keep it easy for them to find their live food.
- Once dragons are 12" or longer, decorate with extra items if you wish. Just remember your dragon needs to have proper UVB exposure and be able to find its food readily.

## Food and supplements

- Dragons of all ages must have fresh greens and vegetables every day. Chop everything so it is no bigger than the dragons head.
- Fruit should be offered twice a week.
- Protein by age:
  - Hatchlings until 6 months of age, all the protein they can eat in 15 minutes, twice a day.
  - Six months to two years, all the protein they can eat in 15 minutes, once a day.
  - Two years and older should be offered protein every other day. But they still get greens and veggies every day.
- Proteins include:
  - Crickets and roaches: These can be fed all they can eat in 15 minute periods twice a day, depending on age. Never feed crickets or roaches that are longer than the space between your dragon's eyes.
  - Superworms: I suggest starting dragons at 12" long with 5 for the first day, then if there are no issues you can raise the number by 1 a day until you reach the limit of 10 per day. The reason for limiting the number they can have per day is the higher

fat content.

- Phoenix worms (for dragons under 12”) and hornworms (for dragons over 12”) are soft and full of protein and calcium. They are great diet supplements for dragons and can be used daily in addition to their protein staples; crickets, roaches or superworms. Up to 10 Phoenix worms and 1 or 2 hornworms are suggested.
- Rep-Cal Calcium with vitamin D3, given 6 days a week. Rep-Cal Herptivite multivitamin given 1 day per week. Sprinkled on salad after misting salad with water.

### Hydration

- Babies should be given a short soak in lukewarm water daily. This guarantees enough hydration and helps the shedding process.
- Dragons, six months and older, should be soaked for 15 minutes twice a week in lukewarm water.

## What to Consider in Buying a Bearded Dragon?

or, *“you get what you pay for”*

- Is the dragon **at least 5-½” long**? If not, there will most likely be problems that can lead to death.
- Do they have the necessary “fat stores”; built up from good daily nutrition that enables them to safely handle the stress from moving from their original home, the stress of a reptile show and then to adjust to living in your home?
- What health guarantee is made on the dragon?
- Is it a male or female? What are the dragon’s genetics and blood lines?
- What diet, hydration, lighting and human contact has it been receiving?
- Does the dragon seem overly “wild” or “skittish”. Daily human contact by the breeder from the beginning relieves this and promotes a good dragon personality.
- What customer support is offered with the dragon? Who do you call with questions or problems and what is their phone number?
- If you’re spending all the effort and expense on habitat set-up and taking care of your new dragon, then why buy a dragon that is not “well started”?

### Who are you buying the dragon from?

- Are they a true breeder or simply a re-seller?
- Are they here today and gone tomorrow if you have questions or a problem?
- Do they offer a business card and receipt that shows the company name / contact name, physical address, email and phone number information?
- Are they established on the internet; a website, on Facebook?

The information provided here are the things that we have found work best for us. Our way is not the only way, as many people have other ideas. We suggest doing research to find what works best for you.

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## Habitat Options

You can start with the minimum of a 20-gallon long tank (30"W x 12"D x 12"H) for dragons up to 12" long. This provides enough length so that the end opposite their basking area (115-120°F) will be about 80°F; allowing the dragon to self-thermogate. After the dragon reaches 12", we recommend a minimum of a 40-gallon breeder tank's size (36"W x 18"D x 16"H). Therefore, unless you already have a suitable habitat, it makes more economic sense to simply go with a cage the size of a 40-gallon breeder tank from the beginning!

You can try to locate a 40-gallon breeder tank at Petsmart or Petco; tank \$140 and screen top \$20. Or you can buy a Carolina Custom Cages Terrarium, Large 36Lx18Wx18H; Easy Assembly with front door access for \$209 on Amazon, or for less from us at a reptile show.

**Beware of cages with limited ventilation;** they make it almost impossible to provide the temperature gradient that your dragon needs to self-thermogate. The habitat either gets too hot, or the basking spot will not be the correct temperature (not hot enough).



## Lighting

We recommend our Carolina Custom Cages' Reptile T5HO 22" Fixture & Reflector with Basking Light Assembly; a compact 22" T5HO (high output) fluorescent fixture and efficient halogen basking light. This all-in-one fixture can be easily mounted under the habitat's top screen for greatest effectiveness. This is your best option. I have found that my dragons (even the older ones) are more active, their appetite is stronger and they seem happier under the T5HO lighting assembly.

## Decorating Your Dragon's Habitat

You may consider using a Carolina Custom Cages' basking rock, Reptile Carpet, Reptile Background, Corner Hammock, Salad Bowl and Worm Dish. Then, after they are 12" long, consider adding a Chaise Lounge. If using the T5HO fixture, remember to maintain at least a 10" vertical / 6" diagonal distance to your dragon's possible positions within the habitat.