



## MISFITS RESCUE



### Bearded Dragon Care Sheet

#### Overview

Bearded dragons are medium-sized, diurnal lizards native to Australia that make engaging, interactive, and generally docile pets. They are intelligent and can recognise their owners, making them suitable for beginner to intermediate reptile keepers who can meet their environmental, nutritional, and welfare needs. This care sheet follows welfare principles consistent with RSPCA guidance, including appropriate housing, nutrition, health care, and enrichment.

#### Lifespan

With correct care, bearded dragons typically live 8–12 years, though some may live up to 15 years in optimal conditions.

#### Housing

Bearded dragons require a secure, well-ventilated vivarium with sufficient floor space for movement and basking.

- **Size:** Adult bearded dragons require at least a 4ft x 2ft x 2ft enclosure (120cm x 60cm x 60cm) minimum. Bigger is always better.
- **Escape-proofing:** Enclosures must be secure, as bearded dragons are strong and curious climbers.



#### Housing Males and Females

Bearded dragons should be housed solitarily, unless breeding.

#### Bedding / Substrate

Safe substrates are crucial to prevent impaction:

- **Up to 6 months of age:** It is recommended to have no substrate at all so you can closely monitor toileting habits and make sure everything is normal and lower the risk of impaction.
- **Older than 6 months old:** A mix of 50/50 topsoil and play sand mix or just play sand can be used. Ensure to cook substrate before use to reduce moisture and minimise humidity.
- **Avoid:** Reptile carpets or coco husk as it carries bacteria and husk can be ingested and cause impaction.
- **Cleaning:** Spot clean daily and replace substrate fully every 1–2 weeks.

#### Temperature and Environment

Bearded dragons are ectothermic and require a temperature gradient:

- **Basking spot:** 38–42°C (75w - 100w intense basking bulb) positioned around 30cm away from the bearded dragons back
- **Cool side:** 24–30°C
- **Night temperature:** 18–24°C



- **Lighting:**

UVB: Full-spectrum 12% UVB light for 10–12 hours/day to prevent metabolic bone disease. Replace bulbs every 6–12 months.

LED: 22W LED Bar or as close to the length of your UVB light is recommended.

An LED and UVB bulb should be positioned on the warm side of the enclosure near the heat source (basking bulb) to mimic natural sunlight, these should not be positioned the full length of your enclosure.

- Avoid placing the vivarium in direct sunlight that can overheat the enclosure.

### **Furnishings and Enrichment**

Enclosures should provide opportunities to express natural behaviours:



- **Basking areas:** Flat rocks, branches, or logs.
- **Hiding spots:** Caves or half logs to reduce stress.
- **Climbing:** Branches and platforms encourage climbing and exercise.
- **Substrate enrichment:** Safe digging areas or textured surfaces can encourage natural behaviours.
- **Enrichment toys:** Occasionally offer safe objects for investigation and foraging to reduce boredom.

### **Diet**

Bearded dragons are omnivores, with diet composition changing with age:

- **Juveniles (0–6 months):** Primarily protein (insects) with some vegetables.
- **Sub-adults (6–12 months):** Balanced mix of insects and vegetables.
- **Adults (12+ months):** Primarily vegetables with occasional insects.



**Insects:** Staple bugs include: Crickets, dubia roaches, calci-worms, locusts and silkworms. Occasional treat bugs include: Morio worms, mealworms and wax worms. Feed gut-loaded and dusted with calcium and vitamin D3 supplements.

It is important not to feed your bearded dragon bugs which are longer than the distance between your dragons' eyes. Feeding bugs too large for your bearded dragon can lead to impaction.

How many insects to feed your bearded dragon:

- **Under 200g** = 5 bugs a day
- **Over 200g up until adulthood** = 5 Bugs every other day
- **Fully grown at 2 years of age** (healthy male 410-430g / healthy female 270-290g) = Bugs twice a week.

**Vegetables:** You should feed your bearded dragon salad every day (with supplements sprinkled on top).

Staple salad includes: Rocket, spring greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, lambs lettuce, watercress, radicchio, frisee, endive, escalope, coriander.

Occasional salad includes: Peeled cucumber, iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, kale, bok choy, turnip greens, alfalfa hay.

**Fruits:** Fruits should be avoided due to the amount of sugar they contain. This can cause obesity and mouth rot. This includes berries, banana, melon, mango, butternut squash and peppers.

**Toxic to bearded dragons:** Avocado, onions, and rhubarb. Spinach also affects calcium levels negatively in bearded dragons.

**Supplements:** It's essential to ensure your bearded dragon gets the correct supplements to ensure they receive the correct balance of nutrients and vitamins. Supplements such as Vitamin D3 and calcium are highly important to prevent diseases such as Metabolic Bone disease (MBD).

Salad and bugs should be dusted daily with a calcium supplement, minus one bug feed per week when a D3 supplement should be used instead.

### Water

Fresh water should always be available in a shallow dish. Mist occasionally to provide hydration and humidity, but avoid excessive moisture.

### Handling

Bearded dragons generally tolerate gentle handling and can become accustomed to human interaction. Always support the body fully, avoid sudden movements, and supervise interactions with children.



### Health and Veterinary Care

Common health issues include:

- Metabolic bone disease (due to calcium or UVB deficiency)
- Impaction (from ingesting substrate or large food items)
- Respiratory infections (from poor temperature/humidity)
- Parasites or mouth rot

Seek care from a qualified reptile / exotic veterinarian if you notice lethargy, loss of appetite, swelling, abnormal droppings, or changes in skin or behaviour.

### Cleaning and Maintenance

- Spot clean daily to remove waste and uneaten food.
- Wash water and food dishes daily.
- Perform a full enclosure clean every 1–2 weeks, disinfecting all surfaces with a reptile-safe disinfectant.



### Legal and Welfare Considerations

Owners have a legal duty under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to meet the five welfare needs of bearded dragons: providing a suitable environment, appropriate diet, opportunities to express natural behaviour, suitable companionship (if applicable), and protection from pain, suffering, injury, and disease.