

Bearded Dragon Care

Pogona vitticeps



Bearded Dragons are perhaps the most ideal beginners pet lizard. Whilst larger and more expensive to keep than Leopard Geckos; also a great beginners pet lizard, Bearded Dragons are more active during the day and appear to be more at home with being held and interacting with people.

In recent years breeders have been producing Bearded Dragons in a range of colours and even scaleless forms. Some of the most popular are the Citrus Yellows and Blood Reds dragons.

Housing

For a single or pair of Bearded Dragons a vivarium 120cm Length x 60cm Width x 60cm Height will be ample room. A vivarium can be made from a number of materials; wooden with melamine coating, glass, plastic and even good quality metal enclosures have been made.

I suggest a wooden vivarium, which is coated with melamine to allow the enclosure to last much longer. If you use regular chipboard or other non-coated woods, the vivarium will not last long with the water spillage and waste products related to keeping any animal. Be sure to have plenty of ventilation holes. Many vivariums are available on the market today already made to suit most reptiles, with ventilation holes and even fittings for the various heat and light appliances.

Substrate & Décor

Bearded Dragons come from dry, arid areas which should be re-created in a captive environment. A choice of substrate very much depends on what is more important for you. If you want something to look natural, then sand

and soils can be the most aesthetically pleasing. These however are dirty and dusty and should be sieved through regularly to remove any waste. If sand is used, calcium based sand is recommended. This dissolves quicker than other sands and will even benefit your gecko with calcium additives when swallowed. Newspaper is cheap and easy to clean, but is not nice to look at. Wood chips can be used, but can often be swallowed by accident, causing an impaction in the gut of the gecko.

For a naturalistic environment, rocks, wood and plants can all be used. Although some live plants are safe to use, I suggest fake plants and cacti. Live plants will require more care and many give off toxic fumes. Be careful when placing heavier objects into the enclosure. Bearded Dragons will often dig holes, particularly females when it comes to laying eggs, so it is essential that they cannot dig below a loose rock or other heavy object. Make sure these objects are placed directly on the bottom of the enclosure and not on top of the sand, as this will collapse if the lizard decides to burrow under.

If you use any objects which have been outside, wash them thoroughly with hot water and weak disinfectant. It is important to be as clinical as possible and reduce any risk of bringing in infectious diseases or parasites.

Heating

Like all reptiles, Bearded Dragons require a thermal gradient, meaning they must be allowed to move around the enclosure to find their required temperature. The hot end of the enclosure should be 90-100°F while the cool end should be approximately 78-82°F. During the night, the temperature should drop to a more constant overall temperature of 76-78°F.

In my opinion, the ideal way of heating a Bearded Dragon enclosure is to use a Ceramic Heater. The **WhitePython™ Ultra Slim Ceramic Heaters** are the ideal choice as it gives off ample heat but equally doesn't take up too much space in your terrarium. Ceramic heaters do not give off light and therefore in a terrarium you will need a form of lighting as well. To regulate the temperature accurately you should use a suitable thermostat. The **WhitePython™ Pro Control 2 Thermostat** will allow you to regulate the ceramic heater with a separate day time and night time temperature and also allow you to time your light to come on during the day.

Power Plates, spot bulbs and heat mats are also ways of heating a terrarium. These all have their advantages and disadvantages, but in my opinion, none quite weigh out to be as good as ceramic heaters.

Lighting

As Bearded Dragons are diurnal, meaning they are active during the day, they must have access to UVA and UVB emitting lights.

There are many types of lights available on the market today. I would recommend a 10% UVB Fluorescent Strip light that stretches the length of your terrarium.



Feeding & Drinking

It is important that water is available at all times. Although they come from dry, arid areas, they still like to drink. A shallow water dish which is hard to tip over and easy to clean is ideal. It is also an idea to have a bowl which does not have small crevices and cracks in it, which mould can build up in, and small insects can hide in.

Bearded Dragons are primarily herbivorous, but almost certainly prefer to eat a diet mainly consisting of insects. Ideally, you should feed your Dragon a diet of approximately 50-70% vegetation including leafy greens, salads and herbs and the remaining should be a mixture of insects which can include crickets, locusts, cockroaches, mealworms and waxworms.

It is important that the food you give your dragon is as highly nutritious as possible. It would be nearly pointless to feed a starved cricket to your dragon. Therefore, placing food such as potato peel and cabbage into the insect's enclosure will benefit the dragon as much as the insects. Gut-Load can also be bought from many retailers. This is a balanced food for insects and should be offered to the insects at least 12 hours before feeding.

Hatchling or juvenile leopard Bearded Dragons should be fed on a daily basis. A Calcium:Phosphorous supplement should be dusted onto the food every other day. This is to aid in growing a healthy, strong bone structure, particularly in the leg and jaw areas.

By Chris Jones
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