

# Bearded Dragons

*Pogona vitticeps*



Bearded dragons are native to Australia. They range primarily in the arid outback, spending the day resting vertically on trees and fence posts basking in the sun. They can grow to be 18-22 inches in length. They reach sexual maturity usually by 2 years of age, at 12-16 inches. The average weight is 283-510 grams (10-18 oz). With proper care, they can live to be 10 years of age.

They make ideal pets as they rarely bite, scratch or whip their tails. They respond to gentle handling and will look you in the eye, eat from your hand and rest in your lap.

A beardie should never be caught or lifted by its tail: its body should be fully supported when it is held or carried.

## Diet

Both live prey and “salads” provide a balanced diet for the beardie. As beardies are active in the day, fresh food should be offered in the morning. Salads consist of chopped mixes of a variety of greens such as romaine, dandelion, turnip or mustard greens, kale, collards, bok choy, spinach, cilantro, beet greens, Swiss chard, escarole, etc. This should have a USP grade calcium carbonate/gluconate/citrate supplement sprinkled and mixed throughout. Small pieces of fruits and vegetables (up to 10-20% of the salad) can be mixed into the greens: squash, zucchini, sweet potato, broccoli, peas, green beans, okra, grated carrot, papaya, melon, or banana. White or yellow edible flowers such as nasturtium, pansy or hibiscus can be offered as treats.

Live prey should be appropriately sized gut-loaded crickets, superworms (*Zophobas*), walking sticks, locusts, and pinkie mice. Larval insects such as mealworms or waxworms should be limited and used mainly as a treat food, given 1-2 X a week with just 2-6 per adult beardie. Prey should be fed the above listed salad mixed with crumbled Insectivore Diet and calcium. In addition, prey can be “dusted” with a vitamin-mineral supplement containing calcium immediately before being offered to the beardie: daily for babies, once a week for adults. Food offered should be an appropriate size for the beardie: babies: feed twice daily 2 week old small crickets. Salad should be available at all times. Crickets should be no longer than the width of the beardie’s head. As the beardie grows, the size of the prey increases and the intake of salad increases.

**Adult beardies** can be fed once daily or every other day, with approximately 75% of the diet being the mixed salad and about 25% or less prey items.

**Juvenile beardies** should be offered food daily. If hungry and housed socially, they may nip the toes and tail-tips of their cagemates if food is not readily available.

Clean water in a shallow bowl should always be available.

## Housing

UVB light for basking is essential. Basking temperatures can be 95-110°F; ambient cage temperature daytime 85-90°F with nighttime 70-80°F. We recommend the use of ceramic heat emitters for heating (on continuously) and MegaRay uVB bulbs for 10-12 hours a day for basking. Light should be supplied for 12-14 hours/day; dark 10-12 hrs. Humidity should be less than 50%. Wood can be used for basking—in the near vertical position. Housing should have various branches and rocks for climbing. Substrate should be newspaper, organic cellulose fiber, or alfalfa pellets. Avoid sand, gravel, corncob, walnut shell, kitty litter, wood shavings as the beardie may eat these and become impacted.

Health care: Annual examination especially for females that may develop eggs. Intestinal parasite examinations at least annually with a fresh stool sample. An older dragon should have blood chemistries checked particularly for liver and kidney function parameters.

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