

Spotted Turtle Care Sheet

Care sheet for the spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*).

By Al Roach

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Frontal shot of an adult male spotted turtle basking on a log. Photo by Al Roach, www.Reptastic.com.

A handsome adult male spotted turtle. Photo by Al Roach, www.Reptastic.com.

An adult female spotted turtle poking her head out for some air. She is checking to see if the coast is clear after she was spooked off her basking area.

Photo by Al Roach, www.Reptastic.com.

A few different spotted turtle hatchlings from different clutches getting anxious to search for prey.

Photo by Al Roach, www.Reptastic.com. Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*)

The spotted turtle is one of the smallest full-size turtles found in the United States. Its black shell is peppered with yellow spots, which vary depending on the spotted turtle's age. Older turtles tend to have many more spots, sometimes more than 125 scattered across their shell and face. Younger turtles may have just a few spots, often only one per scute. A spotted turtle's hingeless plastron is yellow and orange with some blotches of black. Its legs are mainly black with red or orange mixed in with the yellow spots.

Sex is easily determined in spotted turtle adults. Males have a black chin, whereas females have a much brighter orange or reddish chin. Males also have a longer, thicker tail. In most adults, males have brownish eyes, and females have orange eyes.

Spotted Turtle Availability

Spotted turtles are fairly common in the U.S. More and more people produce them each year. Because of captive breeding, their U.S. population has risen during the past couple of years. Many breeders are getting females to triple— or quadruple— clutch each year, which is not known to occur in the wild.

In states where spotted turtles are legal to sell, hatchlings sell for about \$75 to \$95. Their value has come down dramatically during the past four years because of the increase in captive breeding.

Spotted Turtle Size

Adults range from about 4 to 6 inches long. The average is around 4.5 inches. When hatchlings emerge from their eggshells, they measure about 1 inch long. They can triple their size in just a few months. If fed heartily, they can be raised to adults in about three years.

Spotted Turtle Life Span

Spotted turtles can easily outlive their owners. These turtles are known for living more than 100 years, and the oldest on record is still living at more than 150 years old. In order for spotted turtles to reach this age, they need a well-rounded diet.

Spotted Turtle Caging

A medium water-land tub houses approximately one male and three female spotted turtles. You could keep them in an enclosure as large as 5 feet by 5 feet with a water depth of about 5 inches. I wouldn't keep more than 4 males and 15 females in an enclosure this size. Smaller enclosures should have fewer males, or territorial disputes are likely. Add artificial plants to provide comfort and prevent turtles from drowning.

A few different basking spots should be made available to allow your turtle to climb out of the water and completely dry off. This prevents fungus growth on its skin and shell. A heat lamp should be placed about one foot above the basking spot. Submersible filters can also be used to help keep the water clean. Always keep your water clean, clear and cool. Oxygen flow is important, so use a pump to add some splashing at the surface. Be sure the water does not hit a turtle's basking area, so it can completely dry off.

Spotted turtles are poor swimmers, so they should be kept in shallow water about 4 to 6 inches deep. Keeping them in deeper water is a bad idea unless you have experience with these turtles. They often drown in ponds, tanks or other enclosures.

Spotted Turtle Lighting and Temperature

I recommend a water temperature around 65 degrees Fahrenheit with a basking area of about 90 degrees. Spotted turtles should have a few basking areas. I generally place 100-watt bulbs, which produce substantial heat, about 12 to 15 inches from a basking spot. Heat is necessary for any turtle fighting a respiratory infection, so it is good to provide warmth in case they are not feeling well.

A few UVB bulbs should be included, as well. They simulate natural light and assist turtles in synthesizing vitamin D3, which aids calcium absorption.

Spotted Turtle Diet

Spotted turtles feed on a variety of things, but they are mainly carnivorous. Wild turtles feed on just about anything that lives or falls in the water and can fit in their mouth. I have noticed that they prefer foods such as insects and meats. I feed earthworms, waxworms, mealworms, crickets, tadpoles, chicken, crab, turkey, bacon, beef, ReptoMin and trout chow to my turtles. I rarely see them eat greens, but some will consistently feed on them, such as romaine lettuce or vegetation that might grow in your pond.

For the most part, I feed my spotted turtles daily, but it is all right if I miss a day here or there. One year I fed them every other day and actually had more eggs that year. Spotted turtles sometimes feed heavily on one or two specific items then all of a sudden stop eating them completely. At this point you should start offering new foods.

In the wild spotted turtles usually feed from late March through late October. Sometimes they eat into early November. A turtle's stomach must be empty before it enters into a full state of hibernation. Otherwise the food will eventually rot in its stomach and possibly kill the turtle.

Spotted Turtle Handling and Temperament

Spotted turtles should be handled sparingly. Hold them only a few times per week for increments of 20 minutes. If you want to breed your turtle, I would advise against handling it; these turtles need to be stress-free. You also may want to avoid handling recently introduced turtles because you need to make sure they are comfortable with their enclosure and surroundings.

Al Roach is the source for Spotted Turtle information. Please visit his site at www.Reptastic.com.