

Bearded Dragon Cage and Heating Requirements

What is a good size cage for a bearded dragon?

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I've got a bearded dragon, and I've done all of the research but I haven't found a reasonable answer for cage size. He is a juvenile dragon about 8-inches long and is in need of a larger cage. What size is appropriate for him?

If you check back through the archives, I have discussed caging, husbandry and temperature ranges for beardies previously. However, I'll go through the basics for you.

One adult beardie or one breeding pair can be housed in a cage that is 2½ feet tall by 3 feet wide by 3 feet long, as a minimum size. However, using a larger habitat is never a bad idea for adults, but babies do well in 10- to 30-gallon aquariums. Sand can be used as a cage substrate in the bottom, and you should provide hiding areas and climbing branches, as well as a focal hot spot that reaches up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. A temperature of 110 degrees should be on the surface, not the air temperature under the light. The hot spot can have a nice branch or rock for your beardie to sit on while basking. When a beardie reaches its happy high temperature, it may open its mouth in a gape. This is normal behavior during basking. Keep the hot spot on one side of the enclosure so the other end can be somewhat cooler.

You need several different thermometers/hygrometers in the enclosure to ensure that you are maintaining your beardie at the correct range. The cooler side of the habitat should be around 75 to 85 degrees. At night, the cage temperature can drop into the 60s but no lower for pets (breeders can undergo a deeper chilling, but a pet should not be subjected to night-time temperatures lower than the 60s). You can use undertank heat strips or pads to keep the cooler end of the enclosure from becoming too cool.

Provide your beardie with appropriate ultraviolet light (UVB) by using a bulb designed for herps, making sure that there is no plastic or glass between the light and the lizard, and also ensuring that the bulb is at the correct distance as listed on the label for the bulb. UVB lighting is vital to proper growth and health, so make sure that you replace the bulbs when recommended by the manufacturer. You will still be seeing visible light, so you won't be able to tell when the ultraviolet range begins to dissipate.

Set all lights on an appliance timer so that the lights are on for 14 hours per day, and the lizard is in darkness for 10 hours per night. They require a regular, uninterrupted night cycle for their health and well-being.

You can provide this desert creature with a bowl of water, or you can spray water on the dragon daily for moisture. They also get some of their daily water requirement met by consuming their veggies. Beardies are omnivores, and will consume live prey, and vegetables, and it is a good idea to provide a portion of the diet as commercial bearded dragon pellets, which most readily consume.

There you have it. Please take your beardie in to see a herp vet at some point, if you have not already done so, to have it tested for intestinal parasites, at least. It's always a good idea to establish a relationship with a good herp vet before you have an emergency requiring one!