

## Caring for Bearded Dragon Lizards

### Quick tips for taking care of a bearded dragon lizard.

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Keep no more than three baby beardies in a 10-gallon tank with a secure top. Use a 30-50 watt spotlight for basking. Arrange several branches and rocks at different heights in the tank to allow the lizards to bask under the spotlight. They need to reach 95-110 degrees F in order to properly digest their food and grow properly. Use a full-spectrum fluorescent light that emits UV-A and UV-B, and change it out as recommended by the manufacturer. The light will still visibly appear to be working normally, but after a period of time the ultraviolet portion of the light will become weaker, and will no longer assist the lizard in producing vitamin D3, which is necessary for proper calcium utilization. The full-spectrum light should be kept within 12-18 inches of the lizards, or at the distance recommended by the manufacturer. There should not be glass or plastic between the lizards and the light, which can filter out the ultraviolet light. If at all possible, the lizards should be allowed to bask in natural sunlight, unfiltered through glass or plastic, taking care to provide them with adequate shade.

Diet should be varied. Food items should be 1/3 the size of the lizard's head, in order that youngsters can ingest them. They can eat small insects such as crickets, mealworms, baby superworms and waxworms every day. Finely shredded leaves of red lettuce, kale and other greens should be offered daily. A portion of the diet should be commercial bearded dragon food. As they grow, the food items can become larger. They should be sprayed with water every day; they will lap up the water. Keep spraying until they stop lapping. They naturally will lap water off of leaves, and won't often drink from a water dish. Their cage should be kept dry and not humid. They get some of their daily water requirements from ingesting moist vegetables. Gut load the insects and offer a vitamin/mineral powder as recommended by your herp veterinarian.

You can use edible plants in their environment which they will ingest. Be careful what you put in the tank, as beardies tend to try to eat everything in there, even if it is just for decoration!

Adult dragons can eat superworms, crickets and the occasional pinky mouse (but remember that they don't contain the proper calcium: phosphorus ratio, as their bones are not yet developed fully). Bean sprouts, mixed vegetables (either cooked or raw), including corn, broccoli, green beans, carrots, corn and peas can all be safely fed.

Beardies can usually be sexed when they are a few months old, as the males are more aggressive and are usually the more aggressive eaters. When they are 5-6 months old or about 12 inches long, you can ascertain the sex by observing the bulges of the hemipenes of the males. Comparing several juveniles is the best way to choose males vs. females. Secondary sex characteristics include the male developing a dark beard and a wider head, and larger femoral pores. Males do the head-bobbing as a territorial display, but both sexes may arm wave in certain situations.