

Bearded Dragon Nutrition

Should I use crickets and mealworms for my bearded dragon lizard?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a 3½-month-old bearded dragon. He is very healthy, eats well, and loves his veggies. I've been feeding him small crickets (dusted with vitamins every now and then). I was wondering if I should start feeding him mealworms once in a while. Are they more nutritious than crickets? Would it change anything for the better?

When you get a chance, go back through the archives of this column and check out the information that I have written about bearded dragon feeding and husbandry. It explains all of this in detail.

However, for newbies to my column, here goes.

It is always a good idea to vary the food items offered to pet herps. The more the diet is varied, the better off they will be. By varying the diet, you are less likely to create a fussy eater that only picks and chooses one or two food items to the exclusion of the rest, often resulting in nutritional imbalances or deficiencies.

You can begin offering your beardie appropriately sized mealworms, waxworms and other safe bugs (moths, grasshoppers, etc. that you can catch outdoors when the weather is good). If you catch insects outdoors, make sure that they have not been contaminated with any pesticides or insecticides. Also, be aware that they can be the intermediate host for certain parasites, although this is a rare occurrence. Waxworms are high in fat, so don't give those too often (perhaps once a week is enough). Beardies will not have problems with the exoskeletons of mealworms, as is sometimes written.

In addition to vegetables and insects, I recommend that you offer your beardie a commercial bearded dragon diet. Most beardies learn to relish these pellets, and they offer a balance of nutrients. If you provide a commercial bearded dragon ration, then you should not need to add other vitamins or minerals to the diet. Once your lizard is of appropriate size, you can offer it a pinkie mouse from time to time for added nutrition.

Make sure you are providing a temperature range of 80 to 85 degrees with a basking spot of 95 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Most people don't keep their beardies warm enough! Provide a full-spectrum light with ultraviolet spectrum, especially UVB, and change this bulb out regularly, as directed by the manufacturer.

Bon appetit!