

## Before You Purchase a Pet Reptile

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Surrendering to impulse and making purchases without knowing what you're getting into is the number one mistake that can result in unhappy experiences.

The smallest sulcata in this picture can attain the size of the largest sulcata in this picture in one to five years. A full grown adult sulcata is about 10 times the size of the largest one pictured here.

Another historic reptile "victim" is the green iguana. Cute, inexpensive hatchlings are the lure.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of adult green iguanas end up at reptile rescues across the country. One of my previous random neural firings mentioned the time I took on a sick Jackson's chameleon on impulse simply because I thought Jackson's were cool, only to have the lizard die the day after I received it. I didn't cause the chameleon's death, but doing what I did is exactly what you should not do. Never acquire a reptile, especially one that's sick, on impulse. When I was younger I made many common mistakes as I learned the proper approach to pet-keeping. My mistakes involved reptiles since they were the primary focus of my pet-keeping efforts, but basic rules of common sense apply to other types of pets, as well.

For my next few blogs I'm going to discuss common-sense questions you should ask yourself before you purchase a pet reptile. These would hold true for any pet herp, whether a bearded dragon, a Jackson's chameleon, a tortoise or python ... anything.

The question for this week's blog is: How big will it get?

This is very, very, very important to know when you're considering the purchase of a new pet reptile. While walking the aisles of a busy reptile show or checking out the reptiles for sale in a pet store it's easy to catch the fever that makes you want to buy some new pets. This is a fine thing, too, provided you go about it responsibly. Surrendering to impulse and making purchases without knowing what you're getting into is the number one mistake that can result in unhappy herpkeeping experiences.

The classic example in regard to the "How big will it get?" question is the sulcata, or spurred tortoise. The common scenario goes like this: A herper and his 10-year-old son are at a reptile expo and come upon a Rubbermaid tub containing a herd of adorable 2-inch sulcata hatchlings marching around on top of an alfalfa pellet substrate. They're so cute, and don't cost that much, about 50 bucks. The son begs his dad to get one – they're so cute, after all – and Dad plunks down the cash. Junior has gotten his wish and they take their new pet home. Guess what happens next by choosing A or B:

A. The tortoise is taken home and placed in an outdoor tortoise pen, where it has ample space to thrive and grows to its full size 200-pound size, and it lives a long, happy, healthy life.

B. The tortoise is taken home and placed into a 20-gallon aquarium, which it outgrows. Dad realizes they cannot maintain a large tortoise and tries to find another home for the growing pet. Eventually the tortoise ends up an unwanted pet in a rescue facility.

I'm sure scenario A occurs, but scenario B is more likely, especially if the purchaser did not know how big the tortoise would grow when he first bought it.

Another historic reptile "victim" of this situation is the green iguana. Once again, inexpensive hatchlings were the lure, and large adults – some which could get grumpy and all which required very large living quarters – were the results. And the end result? Hundreds, if not thousands, of adult green iguanas ended up (and some still continue to end up) at reptile rescues across the country.

It isn't difficult to find out how large a reptile being offered for sale will eventually grow, and there is no excuse for not knowing before you buy. For one thing, there's the Internet, always ready and always available. Sure there's erroneous information flooding the Web, but by cross-checking and seeking out reputable websites the size of a reptile is easy to

determine with a pretty good degree of accuracy. One such website is ReptileChannel.com, of course -- and yes, the sulcata species profile on ReptileChannel does indicate that this is a giant tortoise.

It's easy to temporarily postpone a purchase in order to conduct some research on a reptile you find at a local pet store. It's not as easy if you're at a two-day reptile expo. One way to avoid falling into the "impulse trap" is by knowing what reptile(s) you want to buy, and conduct your research before you head out to make your purchases. This is the best-case scenario.

Realistically, though, temptation can overwhelm even the best-intentioned reptile hobbyist when he or she is browsing the many reptiles for sale at an expo. If you are at a reptile show and come across a species you never considered owning, and you are so intrigued by it and really want it, at the very least ask the person selling the animal how big it will get. Ask what the seller's return policy is, in case you get the animal home and only then discover it will grow too big for you to provide the necessary care. Of course, with the advent of iPhones and other devices that permit instant access to the Internet, there's a good chance you could do some quick research on the spot to find out the size stats for the species in question.

Always know how big a reptile will get before you bring it home. That's this week's lesson.

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