

A Uromastyx Blog

Some like it hot, especially Uromastyx lizards.

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Mali Uromastyx by Bill Love.
Egyptian Uromastyx by Dick Bartlett.
Ornate Uromastyx by Bill Love.

I saw a comment from Erica in San Diego recently, asking for some information about uromastyx. So, Erica and everyone else, here is a blog about these interesting lizards.

Three Uromastyx species often encountered in the pet trade are the Mali (*U. maliensis*), Egyptian (*U. aegypticus*) and ornate (*U. ornatus*). Others, such as *U. acanthinura*, *U. ocellata*, may also be seen. They are also known as “dabb” – though I have no idea why -- or spiny-tailed lizards. Take a uromastyx quiz [here](#)>>

A general body description for a uromastyx would be a lizard with a bulky body and a small head. The ornate, as its name implies, is the prettiest, therefore it also tends to be the most expensive. I've seen some truly stunning ornate uromastyx exhibiting gorgeous greens and blues. The Mali can be very eye-catching, too, due to its bright yellow coloration along with darker reticulations and spots. The Egyptian, which is basically dark gray or brownish, might be considered the ugly duckling of the uromastyx world when compared to the ornate and Mali.

But looks aren't everything. “Uros” are very personable lizards that can make great pets, and that includes the Egyptian. They generally tame up well and tolerate handling better than many other lizards. I don't know if I'd go as far as to say they're on a par with the bearded dragon when it comes to being a tractable pet, but they're close. They're usually quite mellow and not prone to struggling when being handled.

One feature that stands out on all uromastyx is the thick spiny tail, which makes a handy weapon should a uro need to defend itself. Those spines can feel pretty pointy, which you should keep in mind when handling a pet uromastyx. This is doubly true if you plan to keep Egyptian uromastyx, because they can get pretty big, and as they grow, so do the spines on that tail. The claws on an Egyptian uro can also get pretty rugged.

The Egyptian uromastyx gets bigger than the Mali or ornate, sometimes reaching lengths of nearly 3 feet. That means, of course, that a larger enclosure will be necessary for adult Egyptian uros. One measuring about 5 feet in length would be perfect. Uros are not arboreal, so floor space is most important. The Mali may get to around 14 inches, while the ornate generally tops out at about 12 inches. A substrate that allows burrowing is good for uros, as they all like to burrow. I've heard of them being kept on everything from sand to gravel to alfalfa pellets to birdseed. To promote burrowing, there are special clay-based burrowing substrates available for use with reptiles; look for them in pet stores that sell reptile supplies. Of course, hiding areas should also be offered to help the lizards feel secure. Check out uromastyx videos in our [user-generated video section](#)>>

All uromastyx are desert dwellers that can tolerate very high temperatures – and they do like it hot. Uros do well in temperatures up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and heat lamps capable of warming a basking area to that temperature should be used. A set up that permits thermoregulation between a really hot basking area, a mid-area of around 100 degrees and a cooler end in the 80s works well for uros. Like all basking lizards, they need good UVB lighting, too. Of course, if you can expose your uros to unfiltered sunlight occasionally by placing them outside, that's great. But remember that they require hot temperatures, so even if you keep them outside in sunlight, if it's not hot enough you may still need to provide additional heat from heat lamps or infra-red heating elements.

Uromastyx are herbivorous, and calcium-rich leafy greens, flowers and veggies should be offered to them. Dust their salads with a mineral supplement. You do not need to place water bowls in their enclosures; they'll get the moisture they need from their food. Besides, placing a water bowl in a desert-dwelling lizard's enclosure will raise the humidity level, and that is not something you want. If the inside of a desert lizard's cage is too moist, respiratory or other ailments may begin plaguing the lizards.

As is so often the case, if you're in the market for a uromastyx, it's always best to purchase captive-bred animals. Wild-caught specimens, including young lizards, often do not fare as well in captivity. If you find yourself considering a wild-caught uro, look for one that is alert, with clear eyes, no nasal discharge and no sign of skin abnormalities. Inspect the

vent; it should be free of debris. If possible, ask that it be fed so you can see whether or not it's a ready eater. As soon as possible after bringing the lizard home you should take it to a veterinarian to test for internal parasites, which can be common in wild-caught imports.

Wild-caught reptiles are cheaper, yes, but if you want to start off with the healthiest pet you can and have it around for a long time, captive bred's the way to go. All three of the uros mentioned here are being captive bred in the U.S. They are not as widely bred as leopard geckos and bearded dragons, so they're not as prevalent at reptile expos and in stores as them, but finding uros is not as difficult as it once was. I see them at many of the reptile expos I attend, and they always appear very alert and interested in what's going on around them. To me, their apparent curiosity adds greatly to the appeal of these already very appealing lizards.

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