

Reptile Shipping

What is the best and cheapest way to ship reptiles?

By Bill Love

Q. A pet-relocation company quoted \$745 to ship my daughter's bearded dragon when we move to Florida. What methods do dealers use, and is there a more affordable service?

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A. The cost of transportation has gone up, but that's still a ridiculous price! I'm sure the company quoting that amount calculated your bearded dragon at the same rate as a poodle.

Mammals may have food, water and defecation needs that an airline or freight-carrier employee will need to address during the flight. Federal regulations mandate rules that all companies carrying dogs and cats must follow. That's where the exorbitant costs accumulate.

Herps don't require this specialty care for the short duration of a standard U.S. interstate shipment. Virtually any herp can sit tied inside a sack, which is inside a sturdy box, for three days without harm as long as temperatures don't reach dangerous extremes. Above 90 degrees Fahrenheit or less than 55 degrees might constitute the need for concern with some herp species, but the vast majority would be safe in that zone, and even slightly above or below it.

Heat packs are routinely used in herp shipments. These chemical pouches stay warm for up to a day when activated by air exposure. If you use them, make sure they are separated by packing material, so they don't come in direct contact with the animal. Also, the box must have numerous tiny air holes on multiple sides because heat packs consume oxygen as they work.

Both UPS and FedEx ship lizards, but they only accept live animals from certified shippers. The U.S. Postal Service's Express Mail option also handles live lizards. None of these couriers guarantees live arrival, though.

It never takes longer than overnight for a shipment to be transported across the United States these days via any modern shipping company's fastest service. But don't count on pet-transport businesses to be aware of, or to acknowledge, that fact. If they can lump a lizard in the same fragility category as a mammal and get paid more for delivery, it's easier and more profitable for them to do so.

There is one more alternative: Pay a herp dealer to ship your pet for you. They'll probably already be certified shippers and have the proper shipping boxes on hand.