

## Sonoran Desert Tortoise Feeding and Diet

**My Sonoran Desert tortoises don't eat much.**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

**Q.** I have two young Sonoran desert tortoises. We got them as hatchlings, and they are approximately 1½ years old. At their last checkup, they were great and still appear to be doing fine. The problem is my Sonoran desert tortoises are picky eaters (aren't they all?). They love romaine lettuce and occasionally eat spinach, broccoli, cucumbers and some other veggies, but mostly they hold out for the romaine.

My Sonoran desert tortoises pick through a pile of goodies for the one piece of romaine on the bottom. I bought Tortoise Diet, and they hardly touch it even when I mush it up for them and mix veggies with it.

Is this a battle of wills? I want to give my Sonoran desert tortoises the food they like to eat, but I think they need more variety to ensure proper nutrition. What do you recommend?

**A.** I applaud your trying to vary your Sonoran desert tortoise diet, as the more food items they consume, the better off they are.

I think you should continue adding moistened tortoise diet, and perhaps chopping the vegetables into small enough pieces that the romaine isn't immediately identifiable as such to your Sonoran desert tortoises. Make a tossed salad of the vegetables and moistened commercial diet. It sounds as if you are cutting up the pieces so that they are large enough to be sorted out and picked through by your fussy budgets! I'll bet they will readily consume your offerings if you make the pieces small enough to really become a blend. The commercial diet is an excellent addition to their vegetables.

You might also try some grasses for your Sonoran desert tortoises. If you don't have access to grass that hasn't been treated with insecticide or herbicides, you can purchase grass seed to sprout or you can buy kits offered for sale at pet, home and feed stores, for cats and birds. These are easy to grow and very healthful for them.

If you have specific questions about your Sonoran desert tortoises, you should ask your herp vet for recommendations. If you can't get them to eat any commercial tortoise pellets, ask your vet about using a vitamin and mineral supplement on their veggies. But, I think you should keep trying and don't hesitate to get creative in ways to get these little stubborn guys to consume a more varied diet.

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP has been an avian/exotic/herp animal veterinarian since 1981. She is a regular contributor to REPTILES magazine.

**Need a Herp Vet?**

Find a herp vet with our comprehensive reptile vet directory. If you cannot find a herp vet using our reptile vet directory, a good place to go is the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at [www.arav.com](http://www.arav.com).