

A CLIENT CARE SHEET FOR IGUANAS

The green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) is a tropical lizard of Central and South America. Their normal day consists of finding a sunny spot in which to bask, eating and avoiding predators. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays help the iguana synthesise Vitamin D₃ and absorb other essential nutrients from its mostly vegetarian diet. They rely on fermentation of complex carbohydrates in the colon for a proportion of their calories. Hatchlings acquire the required bacteria by eating the faeces of adult iguanas. Iguanas facilitate this fermentation process and regulate their body temperature by basking in the sun, seeking temperatures above 30°C. The prominence of the basking sites reflects the social ranking of the iguanas. Adult animals may reach a length of two metres and may weigh over 7 kilograms. Handle large specimens with caution. In general they do not breed well in captivity.

Care in captivity

Temperature, humidity and light requirements for an iguana are critical if the animal is to survive in captivity. Housing can be glass or wood cages. A larger aquarium is a good starting size, as these reptiles grow at a rapid rate in the first months of life. The cage should be lined with newspaper, artificial grass or indoor/outdoor carpet; ease of cleaning being the most important consideration. Gravel, sand and soil should be avoided since they are commonly ingested leading to impaction and may contribute to dermatitis if not cleaned regularly. A variety of broad limbs, rocks or pieces of bark should be provided as basking spots.

Temperature

Heat should be provided by a radiant source since the iguana is a basking animal; a 60 to 100 watt incandescent bulb is usually adequate. Heat pads, hot rocks and heating tape are common causes of burns and typically do not provide the heat necessary for the animal to obtain its preferred body temperature. Daytime temperatures of 29-32°C are optimal with a basking area around 5°C above this. Night temperatures can drop 5°C below the day temperature.

Diet

Iguanas are herbivores. They eat leafy greens, vegetables, flowers and fruit that are grated and chopped to a size appropriate to the size and age of the iguana.

Feed a varied diet:

- Greens: mustard green, collard greens, dandelion greens, turnip greens, mulberry leaves, grape leaves, hibiscus and parsley
- Vegetable: beans, peas, turnip, parsnip, squash, sweet potato, zucchini and carrot
- Fruit and flower: papaya, pear, strawberries, raspberries, mango, grapes, apricot, peach, melon, kiwifruit, figs, nasturtium, hibiscus and rose petals

Light

A consistent photoperiod of 14 hours light and 10 hours dark is recommended. An ultraviolet light source should be available within two feet of the lizard to aid in the conversion of vitamin D₃ and other physiological functions. UV light will not penetrate glass.

Diseases

There are numerous diseases that affect iguanas but most are related to inappropriate nutrition and husbandry. Some of the most common are metabolic bone disease, renal problems, bladder stones, dermatitis, burns (from heating pads and hot rocks) and egg retention. Most are treatable with early diagnosis. Your veterinary surgeon should be consulted at the first symptoms or unusual appearance of the iguana.