



Bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) are captivating reptiles native to the arid and semi-arid regions of Australia. Their popularity as pets stems from their docile nature, relatively simple care requirements, and distinctive appearance, characterized by their "beard" of spiky scales that they can puff up when feeling threatened or excited. With proper care and attention, these fascinating creatures can thrive in captivity, providing companionship and enjoyment for many years.



## UNDERSTANDING BEARDED DRAGONS

### Natural Habitat and Behavior

In their native Australian habitat, bearded dragons are primarily found in deserts, dry woodlands, and rocky areas. They are diurnal creatures, meaning they are most active during the day. As ectotherms, they rely on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature, often basking in the sun to warm up and seeking shade to cool down.

Bearded dragons are semi-arboreal, meaning they spend time both on the ground and in elevated areas like rocks and branches. They are omnivores, consuming a diet of insects, vegetation, and occasionally small vertebrates in the wild.

### Anatomy and Physiology

Bearded dragons possess unique physical characteristics that contribute to their survival and adaptability. Their most notable feature is the expandable throat pouch, or "beard," which they puff up to appear larger and more intimidating to potential threats. They also have spiky scales along their body and a strong jaw equipped with both acrodont and pleurodont teeth, allowing them to effectively capture and consume a variety of food items.

Bearded dragons have specialized adaptations for thermoregulation, including the ability to change their skin color to absorb or reflect heat. They also possess a third eye, known as the parietal eye, which helps them detect changes in light and shadow, aiding in predator avoidance and thermoregulation.



## CREATING A SUITABLE HABITAT

### Enclosure Size and Setup

Providing a spacious and well-designed enclosure is crucial for the well-being of your bearded dragon. A minimum tank size of 40 gallons is recommended for adult bearded dragons, while juveniles can start in a 20-gallon tank and be upgraded as they grow. The enclosure should be longer than it is tall to provide ample space for movement and exploration.

The enclosure should be equipped with a secure screen top to ensure proper ventilation while preventing escapes. Furnish the habitat with various elements to mimic their natural environment, including:

- **Basking Area:** Create a designated basking spot using a flat rock or platform placed under a heat lamp. This area should reach temperatures of 90-95°F for adults and 95-100°F for juveniles.
- **Hiding Spots:** Provide multiple hiding places using caves, rocks, or other structures. These offer security and allow your bearded dragon to regulate its body temperature.
- **Climbing Structures:** Include branches, rocks, or other sturdy objects for climbing and exploration. Bearded dragons are natural climbers and enjoy elevated vantage points.

### Substrate

The choice of substrate is important for both hygiene and safety. Avoid loose substrates like sand, especially for juveniles, as they can cause impaction if ingested. Instead, opt for reptile carpet, tile, or newspaper, which are easy to clean and maintain. Bioactive enclosures should only be attempted if one has experience managing a dry, hot and arid set up.

## TEMPERATURE AND LIGHTING

### Temperature Gradient

Bearded dragons require a temperature gradient within their enclosure to thermoregulate effectively. The basking area should be the warmest spot, while the opposite end should be cooler. Use a combination of heat lamps and under-tank heaters to achieve and maintain the desired temperature range.

- **Basking Area:** 90-95°F for adults, 95-100°F for juveniles
- **Cool Area:** 70-75°F



## Lighting

Proper lighting is essential for the health and well-being of your bearded dragon.

- **UVB Lighting:** A UVB light is crucial for calcium metabolism and should be on for 10-12 hours per day. Choose a reptile-specific UVB bulb and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for placement and replacement.
- **Basking Light:** A basking light provides heat and should be positioned to create the desired temperature gradient.
- **Day/Night Cycle:** Maintain a consistent day/night cycle of 12-14 hours of light and 10-12 hours of darkness. This helps regulate their natural rhythms and behaviors.

## DIET AND NUTRITION

### Omnivorous Diet

Bearded dragons are omnivores, meaning they consume both animal and plant matter. Their dietary needs change as they grow, with juveniles requiring more protein from insects and adults shifting towards a more herbivorous diet.

### Insects

Offer a variety of gut-loaded and calcium-dusted insects, such as:

- Crickets
- Dubia roaches
- Mealworms
- Superworms (occasionally, as they are high in fat)
- Hornworms
- Waxworms (occasionally, as they are high in fat)

Feed juveniles insects 1-2 times a day, while adults can be fed insects 1-2 times a week.

### Vegetables and Fruits

Provide a variety of fresh vegetables and some fruits daily. Good options include:

- Leafy greens (collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens)
- Squash
- Bell peppers



- Carrots
- Berries (in moderation)

Chop vegetables into bite-sized pieces and offer them in a shallow dish.

### **Supplements**

Dust insects with calcium powder 3-4 times a week and with a multivitamin once a week in juveniles. For adults, supplementing can be reduced to 2-3 times per week with calcium powder and once every other week for adults.

Multivitamins should not be given on the same day as a calcium supplement. Consult with a reptile veterinarian for specific recommendations based on your bearded dragon's age and health.

## **HYDRATION**

### **Water Dish**

Provide a shallow water dish large enough for your bearded dragon to soak in. Change the water daily to ensure cleanliness and prevent bacterial growth.

### **Misting**

Mist the enclosure regularly to increase humidity and provide additional hydration. Bearded dragons may lick water droplets off leaves or their own bodies.

## **HANDLING AND INTERACTION**

### **Gentle Handling**

Handle your bearded dragon regularly to build trust and reduce stress. Always support their body with both hands and avoid grabbing their tail, as it can easily break off. Never surprise or grab your bearded dragon as this can cause stress and lead to a struggle.

Your bearded dragon should be gently scooped up with both hands so all four legs are supported. If your pet backs away when you try to pick it up or threatens to bite, it is better to leave it alone and wait for another time.



Your bearded dragon should not be away from his cage for a prolonged period of time especially in northern climates during winter when classrooms can become cooler as your bearded dragon's core temperature can drop. Typically, around 10 to 15 minutes at a time is a safe period, depending on the ambient room temperature.

### **Reading Body Language**

Pay attention to your bearded dragon's body language. Signs of stress or discomfort include hissing, puffing up their beard, or flattening their body. If your bearded dragon seems stressed, give them space and try handling them again later.

## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

### **Veterinary Care**

Regular check-ups with a reptile veterinarian are essential for maintaining your bearded dragon's health. A veterinarian can identify potential health issues early on and provide guidance on proper care.

### **Shedding**

Bearded dragons shed their skin as they grow. Shedding frequency varies depending on age and growth rate. During shedding, provide a humid hide or offer lukewarm baths to help loosen the old skin.

### **Brumation**

Brumation is a period of reduced activity that some bearded dragons experience during colder months. It is similar to hibernation but less intense. If your bearded dragon shows signs of brumation, consult with a veterinarian to ensure they are healthy and to adjust their care accordingly.

## **COMMON HEALTH ISSUES**

### **Adenovirus**

Adenovirus is a common virus in bearded dragons, often carried without symptoms. However, it can cause illness in stressed or immunocompromised individuals. Symptoms may include lethargy, loss of appetite, and neurological issues. There is no cure, but supportive care can help manage the disease.



## Dental Disease

Dental disease can occur in bearded dragons due to poor diet or injury. Signs may include swollen gums, difficulty eating, and lethargy. Regular veterinary check-ups can help identify and address dental problems early on.

## Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD)

MBD is a serious condition caused by calcium deficiency or improper calcium metabolism. It can lead to bone deformities, fractures, and other health problems. Ensure your bearded dragon receives adequate UVB lighting and calcium supplementation to prevent MBD.

## CONCLUSION

By understanding the unique needs of bearded dragons and providing them with a suitable habitat, proper nutrition, and regular veterinary care, you can ensure they live long, healthy, and fulfilling lives as cherished companions. Remember, responsible pet ownership involves continuous learning and adaptation to meet the specific needs of your individual bearded dragon.

## HELPFUL LINKS

### Lighting-Heat:

<https://zoomed.com/desert-uvb-heat-lighting-kit/>

<https://zoomed.com/combo-deep-dome-dual-lamp-fixture/>

### Temperature Gauges:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/environmental-control/digital-thermometer>

### Maintenance:

<https://zoomed.com/repti-sand-scooper/>

### Substrate:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/bedding/desert-blend>

### Shelter:

<https://zoomed.com/repti-shelter-3-in-1-cave/>



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## CARE SHEET

# Bearded Dragon

### Diet-Nutrition:

<https://zoomed.com/adult-dragon-food/>

<https://zoomed.com/bearded-dragon-food-juvenile-formula/>

<https://zoomed.com/bearded-dragon-food-adult-formula/>

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/food/reptile-extruded-pellets-bearded-dragon>

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/food/reptile-munchies/reptile-munchies-omnivore-with-calcium>

<http://ca-en.hagen.com/Reptile/Nutrition/Extruded/PT3265>

[https://www.hikari.info/herptile/h\\_04.html](https://www.hikari.info/herptile/h_04.html)

### Supplements:

<https://zoomed.com/repti-calcium-with-d3/>

<https://zoomed.com/reptivite-with-d3/>

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/vitamins-supplements-care/calcium-supplement-spray>

### Temperature Gauges:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/environmental-control/digital-thermometer>

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