

## Reptile Information Care Sheet



Snakes and lizards make up the majority of reptiles housed domestically in Australia. Reptiles are increasing in popularity largely because of reduced space requirements and they are relatively inexpensive to keep (although initial purchase costs can be high). Reptiles are quiet, rarely smell and require minimal cleaning. You can always find a reptile to suit your own living requirements.

### Reptile check list

- Terrarium
- Cage décor
- Plants
- Heat device
- Incandescent or fluorescent lighting
- Reptile carpet
- Specific food
- Reptile friendly disinfectant
- Water & food bowl
- Care book

### Housing - The terrarium

This is obviously dependent on the size and environmental needs of your reptile and of course, the space you have available. Reptile houses are called terrariums. In general they should be draft and escape proof, moisture and heat resistant and well lit. Terrariums can be tall and narrow to accommodate tree dwelling reptiles (e.g. chameleons) or low and wide, suitable for most lizards and ground dwelling snakes. Get the largest terrarium you have space for and can afford. Passion for Pets have a great range available.

### Outfitting your terrarium

Covering the floor of your terrarium is important and there is a variety of coverings to choose from. Sand and shredded bark, are options and provide a great visual appearance. It is also important to provide your reptile with the security of shelters and opportunities to camouflage themselves. Standard décor items may include rocks, basking limbs, plants and logs. Live plants in pots are great but be sure the plant can tolerate the heat and light conditions, plastic plants are a great alternative too.

### Environmental conditions of your terrarium

Heating and lighting are the main focus to consider in your terrarium. Sometimes these elements overlap, for example, full spectrum incandescent lights also provide enough heat for your reptile. It is important to find out the correct temperature and lighting requirements for your particular reptile.

**Heating** - it is best to provide a thermal gradient in your terrarium, i.e. warmer at one end and cooler at the other. Several ways of heating your enclosure include: basking bulbs, ceramic heaters, under tank heaters, central heating for the building or space heaters in the room where the reptile's enclosure is kept. A thermometer should be placed in the terrarium (preferably two, one at each end).

**Lighting** - This can be provided in two ways:

A full spectrum incandescent lamp provides both heat and light and is best used as a basking bulb hanging above the enclosure at one end. A full spectrum fluorescent lamp provides a sunlight replacement for those reptiles that

need it. This lamp may not provide enough heat without a separate heating source. Hot rocks should not be used as they can burn your reptile. Natural sunlight is the best type of full spectrum lighting!

### Feeding requirements

Obviously diets vary depending on your type of reptile and you should consult specific care sheets for advice. However, each animal is primarily one of three types:

**Herbivore** - A plant eater. They need large amounts and a good variety of food. Commercially prepared diets are available for some reptiles; otherwise feed fresh food with vitamin and mineral supplements. Parsley, dandelion leaves, lettuce, cress and fresh fruit are a few options.

**Carnivore** - A meat or protein eater. These are predominantly snakes which love rats, mice and pinkies (baby mice). Lizards often eat insects and invertebrates. Crickets and mealworms are great food sources for lizards.

**Omnivores** - Eat both plant and meat or protein.

### Cleaning requirements

Snakes and lizards are very susceptible to microorganisms and parasites when kept in captivity. Daily cleaning of water and bowls is important. The terrarium itself should be cleaned once a week. Bleaches or alcohol based cleaners are better tolerated than phenol cleaners (such as Pine-o-Clean). Rinse thoroughly with fresh water after disinfecting. Anytime you introduce new cage décor such as logs, rocks, sand etc. it should be sterilised with bleach or a slow heating oven at 120 - 150 degrees. Paint the ends of logs with varnish to prevent parasite infestations.

### A final word

Research the particular reptile that will fit your lifestyle and how interactive you would like to be with your pet. i.e. is your reptile able to be handled, or not? Are you prepared to deal with the feeding and cleaning requirements? You should monitor your reptile daily and get to know normal versus abnormal activity. Don't let your reptile get cold, check the temperature daily. If you remove your pet from its enclosure, ensure the surroundings are safe from cats and dogs and keep doors and windows closed. Enjoy your reptile as they truly make wonderful and fascinating pets. Check with your local wildlife agency or council as to what permits are required for owning a reptile.

