



## General care

A healthy tortoise should be bright and alert with shiny eyes... Its body should be carried above the ground and the head and limbs should withdraw if alarmed. The shell should be hard and there should be no signs of the following:

**Diarrhoea:** this can be caused by incorrect feeding or internal parasite infestation.

**Respiratory problems:** signs include fluid or mucus from the nose.

**Mouth rot:** cheesy deposits appear in the mouth.

**Soft shell disorders:** can be due to a lack of calcium and/or vitamin D<sub>3</sub> and/or incorrect lighting.

Your tortoise should be bathed weekly in order to ensure proper levels of hydration and weighed regularly to ensure that they are growing at a healthy rate.

If you are at all worried about the health of your tortoise you should consult your vet or a specialist reptile vet as soon as possible.

Some reptiles carry a form of salmonella. Salmonella is most usually contracted by ingestion. Good hygiene and washing hands after handling or cleaning your tortoise should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection.



## Shopping List

Indoor enclosure & provision for outdoor enclosure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Heat mat/spotlight	<input type="checkbox"/>	Substrate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thermometers x 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	UVB tube/UVB heat lamp	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food and water bowl	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thermostat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pet safe disinfectant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calcium supplement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vitamin supplement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cage furnishings	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Tortoise care book	<input type="checkbox"/>

***This leaflet is produced by the Pet Care Trust, the national charity that promotes the benefits of pet ownership and education. For more information, go to [www.petcare.org.uk](http://www.petcare.org.uk), or phone 01234 273933.***



**Remember you must never release your pet into the wild.**



# CARING FOR YOUR MEDITERRANEAN TORTOISE

The species of Mediterranean tortoises originate from the countries surrounding the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Their natural habitat is grassland and shrub where there is a lot of sunshine and light shade. The most common species kept in the UK is the Hermann's tortoise. Although other species such as the Spur-thighed and Marginated tortoise are kept. A species requiring generally similar husbandry in captivity is the increasingly popular Horsfield's tortoise.

Tortoises will grow annually in the right conditions and their shell scutes grow somewhat like the rings of a tree. Mediterranean tortoises can reach sizes in excess of 20-25cm in some instances.

**Life expectancy up to 80 years or more under ideal conditions.**





## Housing

Ideally your tortoise should have an indoor area and access to outdoors.

Indoor accommodation: A purpose built enclosure (often called *tortoise tables*) are optimal, although large vivariums with good ventilation can also be used successfully, especially over limited time periods. The minimum cage size for an adult should be 90x30x40 cm for babies up to a 6cm carapace, rising to 2 square metres for adults but the bigger and more varied the habitat provided the more likely the tortoise is to do well.

Outdoor accommodation: Tortoise should have access to escape proof outdoor accommodation whenever the weather is suitable. Ideally situated where there is natural non-toxic vegetation. Provide a basking area and opportunities to climb. All outdoor accommodation should be fox proof and a fully covered enclosure is essential for small tortoise to protect them from airborne predators.

**Temperature** - All reptiles are cold blooded and need an external heat source to maintain their body temperature. Each species requires different degrees of heating, but all will benefit from a range of temperatures within the indoor enclosure. One end should be heated. This creates a thermal gradient allowing the tortoise to choose its preferred temperature. Thermometers can be placed at each end to monitor the temperature range. The overall temperature should be controlled by a thermostat.

Wire mesh guards should be fitted over all hot heat sources used in order to prevent thermal burns. Heat can be supplied by spotlights and/or UV heat lamps. Your pet shop will advise on heating products and their use suitable for your tortoise. Create a thermal gradient of 18-20°C at the cool end and 30-32°C at the hot end. Night temperature can safely be dropped to 18° or even a bit lower.

**Lighting** – Tortoises are diurnal and require strong UVB lighting to fully absorb and utilize the calcium in their diet. This light should be left on for 12-14 hours in the day. The bulbs will need replacing from time to time and your pet shop will advise you.

**Furnishings** - The floor of the cage should be covered with a suitable substrate such as, Coconut bark chips, Aspen wood shavings, Calci-sand or artificial grass – if using a product like Calci-sand it is recommended that a rich source of calcium is supplied so that the animals do not ingest too much of the substrate as a calcium source (resulting in possible gut impaction). Provide a shelter, perhaps with a piece of cork bark and additional bark or branches to create areas for climbing.

**Cleaning** - Remove droppings and uneaten food daily. Water and food bowls should be washed, dried and refilled daily. Vivariums should be completely cleaned out and disinfected with a pet-safe disinfectant regularly. Soiled substrate should be disposed of and replaced. Deodorisers can be used in the indoor enclosure - your pet shop will advise.

**Hibernation**- This is a complicated procedure and you should ideally seek professional advice before you hibernate your tortoise., However before you consider hibernating your tortoise, it should be of sufficient size and weight and be showing no signs of illness to cope with the stress of hibernation. Your tortoise should be fasted for 2-3 weeks before hibernation (though fresh water must be provided). Your hibernation box should be well ventilated and be made of rat proof materials. The temperature should not fall below 2-3 C and not above 8C (optimum temperature is 5C). You should check your tortoise at regular intervals during hibernation. A reliable refrigerator set at the correct temperature can be ideal for this purpose.



## Feeding and Water

Mediterranean tortoises are herbivores. Provide a varied *high fibre diet* low in fat and protein. Commercial pellets are available as part of a balanced diet and your pet shop will advise.

Vegetables: Mixed vegetables and as many weeds and herbs such as, dandelion, groundsel, clover, sowthistle, etc. as possible – natural grazing in outdoor enclosures is ideal.

Fruit: apples, berries, fresh and frozen (thawed), grapes, kiwi, pear, fed only occasionally in very small amounts since high sugar content in the diet is dangerous.

A Calcium supplement and a separate multi vitamin should be added to the food provided. Fresh water should always be available.

## Tortoises and the law

Mediterranean tortoises are protected by CITES regulations, all can only be legally sold (with the exception of the Horsfield's tortoise), with a DEFRA Article 10 Exemption Certificate. They must be micro-chipped when big enough if being sold.