

Uromastyx Care Sheet

There are approximately 13 species in the genus *Uromastyx*. These lizards are adapted to arid regions and are found from northwestern India, throughout southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula to the Sahara of Africa. Members of this genus are referred to as dab lizards or spiny tailed lizards.

Colouration is variable between and within species; *Uromastyx aegypticus* are usually dark to light brown. Other species can be green, yellow, bright orange or a combination of these colours.

General Characteristics

Behaviour differs between species and even individuals within the same species. Some, *Uromastyx acanthinurus* and *Uromastyx aegypticus*, can be very shy, often retreating to a hide spot when someone approaches the cage, others, *Uromastyx ornatus* will often be tame, individuals differ in their behaviour and you can find exceptions to the above generalizations.

Sexing

The presence of large femoral pores with waxy protuberance and hemipene bulges can often distinguish males, however this is not obvious on all species. Males tend to have broader heads but this is often subtle or misleading.

Social Behaviour

Most lizards are territorial, which means that the male and sometimes the female will defend an area from members of the same species or even other species. Often in captivity two male lizards will fight openly. Even if aggression is not overt, the submissive male can be adversely affected.

Uromastyx males should be housed separately. Some herpetoculturists even house females individually and only introduce them to males during the breeding season.

Caging

Each species of lizard is adapted to specific environmental conditions. Knowledge about a species macro and micro habitat is critical in designing a cage setup, however limited information is available regarding habitat type for each species of *Uromastyx*. Generally the species are found in deserts; therefore they are best kept in desert setups.

The best cage for a fully grown *Uromastyx* would be a large vivarium, specifically for the *Uromastyx aegypticus* needing a vivarium up to 6-8ft long

Temperature

These lizards are adapted to hot desert condition; the cage should have a daytime hot basking spot where the temperature exceeds 120F, however the lizard must be able to retreat to areas in the low 90's. Incandescent spotlights can provide hot basking spots; the wattage selected depends on the size of the cage. Thermometers should be placed at both end of the cage and monitored to ensure a proper temperature gradient.

Under tank heaters can be used to supplement heat, however these are diurnal species and regulate their body temperature by basking in the sun. Spotlights more accurately approximate the way diurnal lizards obtain their heat naturally.

Night time temperatures should be less than the daytime highs. Temperatures should be allowed to drop into the mid 60'sF

Lighting

There are several full spectrum fluorescent light bulbs on the market. Most claim that they duplicate the sun's light spectrum, however it is unlikely that any can achieve the intensity of the ultraviolet light emitted by the sun. There is no scientific research supporting the assumption that these bulbs are beneficial, however their use is recommended since there is some anecdotal evidence that they provide psychological benefits to the lizards.

Water

Most desert species are adapted to live without water. *Uromastix ornatus* comes from the Sinai Peninsula where it rains less than 2 inches per year. Many species obtain moisture from the food they consume.

Many herpetoculturists soak their *Uromastix aegypticus* in water and claim that the animal swells as it absorbs water. Whether the animal is actually filling up with water or only filling its body cavity with air is unknown. Considering this is a desert species, soaking in water seems inconsistent with adaptations to arid conditions and could lead to respiratory infections if the animal does not thoroughly dry after soaking.

Water can be provided infrequently in a bowl. The bowl should not be left for long periods in the cage or it can raise the humidity to possibly unacceptable levels. Baby *Uromastix ornatus* will drink water sprayed on the side of the cage.

Food

Uromastix are omnivorous which means they consume both animal and plant materials. Since there is no data about specific nutritional requirements of this genus a large variety of food items should be offered.

Young animals more readily accept insects such as wax worms, crickets, and super mealworms, which should be offered three or four times per week. The following vegetables should be offered; kale, collard greens, mustard greens, sweet potatoes, carrots, peas, corn, green peas and endive. In addition, dandelion greens, alfalfa, grass and flowers can be added to the diet. Beans such as split peas, lentils, navy beans and others should be provided. Some of these beans can be sprouted prior to feeding. Bird seed should also be mixed in the salad.

A reptile vitamin containing calcium should be sprinkled on the salad. Some of the commercial iguana chows can also be mixed in with the salad to ensure better nutrition.

There are some indications that nutritional needs are not easily met for this genus. Several herpetoculturists who are raising young *Uromastix aegypticus* report slow growth rates. For example after obtaining 2 *Uromastix aegypticus* at 3 inches long within 8 months one animal was 5 inches long and the other was 11 inches and much bulkier. The only difference in husbandry was that the larger animal would eat insects and the smaller one would not.