

# GREEN IGUANAS

## SPECIES NAME

*Iguana iguana*, Green Iguanas.

## HOUSING

Though hatchlings and juveniles can initially be housed in 50 to 55-gallon aquariums, they will quickly outgrow these accommodations. Habitats for green iguanas should be **at a minimum** of 6' by 3' at the base, and be built sufficiently tall enough for the iguana to climb (at least six feet high). The larger enclosure that can be provided, the better. Multiple areas for basking (sitting under a heat source) and climbing should be provided. The cage bottom or aquarium floor is best covered with newspaper, butcher (brown) paper or indoor/outdoor carpeting. These should be changed frequently. Do not use pea gravel, shredded corncob, sand, wood shavings, kitty litter or sawdust. None of these products promotes the necessary level of cleanliness and may be accidentally eaten by the iguana, causing intestinal impaction. Likewise, moss retains moisture and can be the source for bacterial infection of the skin. An area of the habitat should provide visual security for the iguana. This can be a box large enough for the iguana to get in and out of, or a dense grouping of artificial plants, which the iguana can hide in.

A captive iguana's environment must be kept fastidiously clean and dry if serious problems are to be avoided. Allowing an iguana the free roam of the house is not recommended.

## HEATING

Iguanas like all reptiles, are ectothermic ("cold-blooded") and therefore require external sources of heat to raise their body temperature to the optimum level. Heat is best provided by a light source or a ceramic heat emitter rather than a hot rock, heating pad, or similar device. Burns from hot rocks are common and can lead to serious skin/scale infections. A heat lamp placed at one end of the enclosure will create a thermal gradient, allowing the iguana to choose the ideal temperature spot. The optimal environmental temperature for iguana enclosures is between 85° F at the cool end and 103° F at the warm end. A thermometer should be placed at each end of the enclosure to monitor temperature levels.

## LIGHTING

Ideally, green iguanas should receive at least 2 hours of direct, outdoor sunlight daily to provide them with full-spectrum UV light essential for proper metabolic function. When this is not possible, UV light must be supplied through artificial lights. Outdoor habitats that receive direct sunlight (not filtered through glass) do not require artificial lighting. Use only lights designed for reptiles that state they supply both UV-A and UV-B rays. Supply 10 to 12 hours of light and 12 to 14 hours of darkness daily. A simple plug-in timer can be used to simulate natural daylight hours. Increase the daylight hours in the spring and decrease them in the fall and winter. Artificial UV sources need to be on for at least 8 hours daily. Change UV bulbs every 6 months, even if they appear to be functioning normally, since their ability to produce UV light diminishes over time. **Even if you supply artificial UV sources, we recommend exposure to natural sunlight as often as possible.** While in the sun, provide some shade so the iguana can move out of the sun if it gets too warm.

## FEEDING

Iguanas are almost completely herbivorous. Their diet should consist mainly of a 'salad' of greens and leaves, vegetables, and occasional fruit. See the Green Iguana Diet handout for specific dietary information.

## SUPPLEMENTS

Iguana diets are frequently deficient in calcium, a nutrient necessary for proper bone formation and cellular metabolism. Calcium should be supplemented into the diet at least two to three times a week for adult iguanas, daily for juveniles. Good sources of calcium supplements are products such as ReptiCal™, crushed calcium carbonate (such as Tums™ tablets), or calcium gluconate tablets. A multivitamin supplement such as Nekton-Rep™ or ReptiVite™ may also be used once or twice a week.

## WATER

Water can be made available to captive iguanas in a variety of ways. A standing water source, such as a ceramic dish, can be used for bathing or drinking. Change the water once or twice daily. Misting the artificial plants in the enclosure and allowing the iguana to lap the moisture is an alternative.

A bathtub, available for the iguana's use only, would provide wonderful recreation. Swimming is great exercise and the tub is a nearly escape-proof holding area for times when the iguana's enclosure is being cleaned. Put enough water into the tub to allow 2/3 immersion of the iguana (he can touch bottom). The water temperature is best when warm to the touch. Children's plastic pools can also be used. **Iguanas can swim in a chlorinated pool for short periods of time with CLOSE SUPERVISION. Rinse the iguana completely after swimming.**

## REFERENCE

1. *Biology, Husbandry, and Medicine of the Green Iguana*. Jacobson, E.R. Ed. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 2003.
2. De Vosjoli, P. *The Green Iguana Manual*. Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, Inc., 2003.