



Introduction to Iguana Care

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Iguanas are becoming popular pets. They are native to Mexico and Central America and are accustomed to very warm days and slightly cooler nights. They enjoy climbing branches and basking in the sunlight.

Housing

A proper enclosure ensures your iguana's safety while providing a clean, comfortable, and roomy living space. Your iguana should be able to turn around and enjoy normal exercise, which includes climbing spots and a place to hide. The larger the space, the better. At a minimum, the enclosure should be twice as long as your iguana from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. At a minimum, it should be as wide as the iguana from nose to tail tip. A full-grown iguana can reach 4-5 ft. in length. Iguanas of this size ideally need a whole room to themselves!

The ability to clean your iguana's enclosure is another important consideration. The enclosure should have a solid bottom, and be constructed of a substance that is easy to clean. Glass, hard plastics, and stainless steel are good materials. Wooden enclosures are not recommended, as they are difficult to clean and disinfect.

Regular cleaning of the enclosure is very important. Uneaten food should be removed daily. The enclosure should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected at least once a week. The enclosure can be cleaned with a mild soap solution, and then disinfected with a solution of 1 capful bleach to 1 gallon of water. Pet stores also carry cleaning solutions specifically designed for reptiles. Be sure to RINSE the enclosure well, and dry it thoroughly before returning the iguana.



Props are important for the well-being of your iguana. Logs, rocks, and plants (real or artificial) provide spaces to exercise and hide. It can be stressful for an iguana to have no place to hide. Rearrange the props in your enclosure often to help prevent him from becoming bored. Clean all props on a regular basis.

The recommended substrate/bedding materials are paper and indoor/outdoor carpeting (this looks like artificial grass and is washable). These products are easy to find, clean, safe, and inexpensive. We DO NOT recommend corncob, wood shavings, sand, or gravel. These materials can be eaten and result in an impaction that may require surgery to remove. Also, bacteria and fungi grow in these substrates and can irritate the eyes and respiratory system.

Heat and Lighting

Your Iguana's basking temperature should be anywhere from 95-105 degrees Fahrenheit. The warm side of the enclosure should be in the high 80s and the cool areas should be in the high 70s-low 80s. The humidity in the enclosure should be around 70%. They should have areas in the enclosure to escape the heat vertically, as they are an arboreal (tree-dwelling) species. Use reliable thermometers in the enclosure to monitor the heat.

A UVA/UVB light should be used 10-12 hours per day all year long. Iguanas that do not get the amount of UV light they need lose bone density and become susceptible to multiple fractures (similar to osteoporosis in humans). These bulbs will stop emitting UV rays long before the bulb itself burns out. Date and change the UV bulbs at least every six months to be sure your iguana is getting the rays it needs. Note that fluorescent UV lights do not produce heat and must be used in addition to a heat source. Any lights should be placed where your iguana cannot climb to or come in contact with them.

Natural sunlight, when available, is the preferred source. Glass windows and aquariums filter out much of the beneficial sunlight. Place the enclosure (with a screen top) by an opened window or a safe place outside for a portion of the day when possible. Your iguana should always have a shaded area to use if he chooses.

Diet

Iguanas are folivores (leaf eaters) in the wild. They eat plant-based diets, with protein coming from a plant source also. Dark, leafy greens are the closest we can get to providing iguanas with food that resembles the foliage they would consume in the wild. Rip the greens into pieces a little larger than the iguana's head and serve them by themselves in a heaping pile. For fun and natural feeding activity, hang a whole leaf from the top of the enclosure so that it dangles inside, and let your iguana grab and tear at it as he would in the wild.

Iguanas DO NOT require animal proteins (fish, poultry, beef, dairy, eggs, insects, etc.). These foods can harm your Iguana's kidneys and cause kidney failure. We do not recommend feeding tofu to your iguana. Although tofu is a plant-based protein, it is high in fat and can impede calcium absorption. Iguanas also DO NOT need bird gravel.

A basic iguana diet should include the following: watercress, dandelion (including flowers), escarole, mustard greens (including flowers), collards, yellow wax beans, parsley, blackberries, turnip greens, green onions, and okra.

Other foods to supplement an iguana's diet include apples, cantaloupe, kiwi fruit, cabbage, mango, raisins, squash, boiled rice, carrots, Brussels sprout, cereals low in sugar, raw or boiled mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, green beans, bananas, bok choy, radish, red/green/yellow bell peppers, and kale.

None of the supplemental items should be fed exclusively. When fed in excess, vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprout, kale, cabbage, cauliflower, and bok choy can cause hypothyroidism (a thyroid deficiency). Spinach, rhubarb, beets, and chards are high in oxalic acid and may cause gout when fed too much over time. These foods also bind calcium, effectively preventing the body from utilizing dietary calcium. These vegetables may be fed in small amounts, in addition to the basic diet.

Fruits should compose the smallest part of the iguana's diet. Most fruits are very low in calcium and often fairly high in phosphorus. Although iguanas almost always accept bananas, they should not become a major component of their diet.

You may also feed alfalfa pellets (found in many rabbit foods) mixed with vegetables or fruits (which will break the pellets down due to their moisture content). Alfalfa pellets provide a good source of protein and calcium.

There are several edible flowers that you can grow yourself or buy in the produce section (not the flower section) of the grocery store or plant nursery. Be sure that they have not been treated with pesticides of any kind. Edible plants include hibiscus (flowers and leaves), nasturtium (flowers and leaves), rose petals, violets (flowers and leaves), and geraniums.

You may find that your iguana has definite color and shape preferences when it comes to food. For example, he might pick collards as his favorite. The next foods you could try mixing would be other dark green foods like parsley, broccoli, etc. If he likes carrots, try introducing sweet potato. Experiment! An iguana that will not eat fresh sweet potato, may eat cooked and mashed sweet potato. Use a vegetable peeler to make shavings of food or chop them

into small pieces. We recommend sprinkling a powdered reptile vitamin supplement over the food once weekly. A calcium supplement without phosphorus (e.g. Rep-Cal) should be given 3-4 times weekly.

Water should be available to your iguana at all times. A low-sided bowl or container is best. The container should be washed and fresh water given on a daily basis. In addition to a water bowl, your iguana should be misted with water from a spray bottle daily. Some iguanas prefer to drink water droplets left on the sides of their enclosure.

Bathing

Iguanas are great swimmers. Putting them in water a few times a week will not only give them exercise, but it will also help them shed their skin (when going through a shed). Warm water will also stimulate a reptile to empty its bowels and bladder. This can be used on a constipated iguana, or as part of a schedule to help prevent unwanted accidents. We recommend that you use a separate container for bathing your iguana. Any reptile can carry salmonella bacteria and you do not want to expose yourself to it by using the same tub as your iguana.

Clean your pet's tub and rinse it well before and after use. The water should be warm, not hot. Fill the tub 1/3 to 1/2 full. Never put a sickly or weak iguana in water over its head. You may find your iguana changes color when bathing. This is normal. You may also see him breathing or puffing more than usual. These are signs that he is adjusting to the temperature of the water.

Outdoor Time

If you want to bring your iguana outside, there are a few things to consider. Make sure the temperature will be comfortable (70-90 degrees). Remember that your Iguana cannot regulate his own body temperature. The only way he can warm or cool himself is by moving to a warmer or cooler location. Iguanas can move with amazing speed when they want to! They are also good climbers. Use a cat harness and leash to help prevent the heartbreak of losing your pet outside. Always keep an eye on your Iguana outdoors to protect him from predators.

Salmonella

Any reptile may be carrying salmonella, even when they are perfectly healthy. Many reptiles are persistently infected. This means that they harbor the bacteria in their body at all times, and shed the bacteria into the environment when stressed. The most common sources of stress are inappropriate habitats and poor diet.

It is safest to assume that your reptile is always shedding salmonella. Always wash your hands

after handling. It is especially important to supervise small children. Children and immunocompromised individuals are at most risk for serious illness from salmonella infection.

Other Illness

Most diseases in iguanas result from dirty enclosures, poor diets, and cool temperatures. Proper care of your iguana will greatly reduce the incidence of disease. Diseases in iguanas often come on very slowly, so it can be difficult to detect these diseases before they become advanced.

Knowing what is normal for your iguana is very important. Become familiar with your iguana's normal appetite, activity level, amount and frequency of urination and defecation, the appearance of waste products, and the general appearance of your reptile. A change in one of these normal parameters may be a sign of disease. If you notice a change in your iguana, observe him very closely. If the signs or symptoms persist for one or two days, or you notice new signs/symptoms, please call us for an appointment. The sooner we are able to address a problem, the more successful we will be in treating it.

Signs that may indicate a medical emergency include bloody waste products, heavy breathing or panting, seizures, bloody discharges, and lameness. Call us immediately if you notice any of the above.

Preventive Care

We recommend a yearly physical examination for your iguana to be sure he is healthy. The signs of poor health in iguanas can be subtle and if they are not recognized early, it can be too late to successfully treat a problem. Also, it is possible for iguanas to get internal parasites and have them for a long period of time before they display any symptoms. Because of this, we recommend a yearly fecal test (a test run from a stool sample). We also recommend a yearly blood test to check calcium and phosphorus levels. This will ensure that your iguana's dietary needs are being met and will allow us to address any deficiencies before they cause a major problem such as metabolic bone disease.