



Introduction to Water Dragon Care

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Water dragons are native to Southeast Asia and the Indo-Australian archipelago. They are accustomed to warm temperatures and high humidity. They enjoy swimming, climbing, and jumping to and from branches.

Housing

A proper enclosure ensures your water dragon's safety while providing a clean, comfortable, and roomy living space. Water dragons can grow up to 3 feet in length, so a larger space is better. At a minimum, the enclosure needs to be at least twice the length of your dragon, measured from the nose to the tail tip. For example, a 3 ft. dragon needs an enclosure that is at least 6 ft. wide. The depth of the enclosure should be at least half of the dragon's length from nose to tail tip. Because they like to climb, water dragons will appreciate an enclosure with high walls of 4'-6'. An ideal enclosure for a 3 ft. adult would be roughly 7' W x 3' D x 5' H.

Water dragons can live together. Males tend to get along better with each other than females. Watch your dragons closely to ensure that one dragon is not guarding access to resources like food and basking spots.

Provide plenty of props in your dragon's landscape. Logs, rocks, and plants (real or artificial) provide places to exercise and hide. Change the configuration of the props to prevent boredom. It's important to clean the props on a regular basis. We DO NOT recommend heat rocks, as they can malfunction and cause severe contact burns.

Water should be available to your dragon at all times. Create a pool of water covering at least half of the enclosure's floor space. The water needs to be deep enough so your dragon can submerge itself and swim comfortably. Branches can be placed over the pool so your dragon can dive in from above.



The other half of the enclosure should consist of ground area. Artificial grass or indoor/outdoor carpeting makes for a good substrate that is easy to clean. Shredded paper is also acceptable. Avoid sand, corn cob, wood shavings, or bark mulch which can cause impaction if swallowed by your dragon. Impaction may require surgical treatment.

Cleaning your water dragon's enclosure regularly will help to keep them healthy. Uneaten food should be removed daily. Clean and disinfect the enclosure at least once a week. Clean the enclosure with a mild soap solution and disinfect with a mixture of 1 capful bleach to 1 gallon of water and be sure to rinse well. Pet stores also carry disinfectants designed specifically for reptiles. It is important to rinse and dry the enclosure well before your dragon returns to it.

Heat & Lighting

During the day, the warm side of the enclosure should be in the mid-high 80s (degrees Fahrenheit), the basking area should be in the mid-90s, and the cool side should be in the mid 70s. At night, the enclosure temperature should be in the 70s to mimic natural conditions.

Natural sunlight, when available, is the preferred UV source. Glass windows and aquariums filter out much of the beneficial sunlight. Place the enclosure (with a screen top) by an open window or safe place outdoors for a portion of the day during warm weather. Your water dragon should always have access to shaded areas of the enclosure if they choose. Providing your dragon with warm and cool areas in the enclosure allows him to thermoregulate.

An ultraviolet light that emits both UVA and UVB rays should be used year-round. These bulbs will stop emitting the necessary UV rays long before the bulb itself burns out. Date and change the UV bulbs at least every 6 months to be sure your dragon gets adequate UV rays. 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 dragon cannot climb or come into contact with them.

Diet

Water dragons are primarily carnivores (meat-eaters), however, they will eat some greens, vegetables, and fruits. It's important to add calcium, vitamin D₃, and a multivitamin/mineral supplement to your dragon's food.

For hatchlings and juveniles, feed your dragon every 2 days. Crickets that are 2-3 weeks old are suitable. The crickets you purchase should be "gut-loaded" with calcium. Most crickets are sold this way, but if your pet store does not "gut-load" their crickets for you, you can purchase an insect food sold for this purpose and follow the directions on the package. The crickets you feed your dragon should be no larger than the distance between your dragon's eyes. Remove

any uneaten crickets after 10 minutes.

As your dragon grows, offer slightly larger crickets. You may also add in some mealworms, waxworms, and "pinkie" mice (1-day old baby mice). You can leave live mealworms and waxworms in the enclosure for up to 24 hours and then remove them.

Feed adult water dragons every 3 or 4 days. Increase the size of the crickets and mealworms accordingly. Adults can also eat older mice and king mealworms. Remember the rule of thumb: no bigger than the distance between your dragon's eyes. The crickets need to be "gut-loaded" for both juveniles and adults. Supplement live food items with dusted-on calcium (without phosphorous, e.g. Rep-Cal) before feeding.

Water dragons need plant material in their diet too. Offer finely chopped leafy greens on a daily basis, such as romaine lettuce, spring mix, red or green leaf lettuce, dandelion, mustard, or collard greens. Choose a variety of greens to balance the vitamins and minerals in your dragon's diet. Smaller amounts of fresh, finely chopped, or grated vegetables can be offered in addition to the greens, such as cabbage, squash, carrots, Brussel sprouts, sweet potato, cauliflower, broccoli, green/yellow/wax beans, radish, and green/yellow/red peppers.

Bits of chopped fruit make a great treat and should be offered only sparingly. Try apples, bananas, berries, grapes, melons, etc.

Outdoor time

If you want to bring your water dragon outside, there are a few things to consider. Make sure the temperature will be comfortable (70-90 degrees). Remember that your dragon cannot regulate his own body temperature. The only way he can warm or cool himself is by moving to a warmer or cooler location. Dragons 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 dragon 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 reptiles. 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 water dragons result from dirty enclosures, poor diet, cool temperatures, and lack of UV light. Proper care of your dragon will greatly reduce the incidence of disease. Diseases in dragons often progress slowly, so it can be difficult to detect diseases before they reach advanced stages.

Knowing what is normal for your dragon is important. Familiarize yourself with your dragon's normal appetite, activity level, amount and frequency of urination/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 dragon, and the change persists beyond 1-2 days, or if you notice additional symptoms, please call us for an appointment. The sooner we can address the issue, the better chance we have at successful treatment.

Signs of an emergency may include bloody waste products, heavy breathing/panting, seizures, bloody discharges, and lameness. Call us immediately if you notice these symptoms.

Preventive Care

We recommend twice-yearly exams for juveniles and once-yearly exams for healthy adults. The signs of poor health in water dragons can be subtle and may not be treatable in advanced stages. At your dragon's annual exam, we will check his eyes, ears, nose, mouth, skin, limbs, heart and lungs, cloaca, and general body condition including weight and general appearance. We will also share with you any new information we have regarding water dragon care. Each year there are advancements in the preventive health of exotic animals.