



Blue-Tongue Skinks

Tiliqua spp.

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Native to Australia and New Guinea, the **blue-tongue skink** makes a wonderful lizard pet, especially due to its small size, and gentleness around people. There are 17 species of blue-tongue skink. The common or Northern blue-tongue (*T. scincoides*) is the most common pet species. The shingleback skink (*T. rugosa*) has distinctively raised scales and a bobbed tail. Average life span is 15-20 years. They generally grow to be 16-24 inches.

Health care: Skinks can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months, CBC, chemistries, and fecal float. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Common problems are anorexia, cancer, intestinal obstruction, constipation, upper respiratory infections, pneumonia, intestinal parasites, and dietary deficiencies. Remember with any disease processes, the sooner we see the animal, the more successful we are at treating it!

Husbandry concerns: Do not house with species from other countries, to prevent exposure to new diseases. Excessive handling while they are new should be avoided. Obviously the larger a cage the better, but the minimums recommended include 72" long x 16" wide x 17" high per adult. For multiple skinks, 8 square feet floor space for 3 adults is adequate. Large aquariums with screen tops often work well. It is best to house them singly, however male/female pairs, or multiple females often get along (though gender determination in blue-tongue skinks is difficult). Watch for signs of aggression and separate the skinks if necessary. Do not house males together as they will fight. Use newspaper, or paper pulp material bedding, or large rocks or artificial turf that cannot be ingested. Climbing objects are good to provide, but remember there is no good way to fully clean wooden items, and they should be periodically thrown away and replaced. Provide hide boxes on both the warm and cool side of the cage. A ceramic heat lamp should provide a focal basking spot of 90-95°F, while the rest of the cage should have a gradient down to 80°F. Do not allow contact with the lamp. Do not use hot rocks or pads as they can easily cause thermal burns! At night, make sure lights are off and allow the cage to cool down into the 70°'s. Use a digital thermometer for temperature measurement and measure at the level where the skink lives. A UV light is necessary, and should provide 12 hours of light with at least 5% UVB, not being screened by plastic/glass/mesh, and within 14 inches of the skink. If the light is going to pass through the mesh top of a cage, it should be at least 9% UVB, as 40% of UVB is lost passing through

More on the back!

the mesh. Outdoor enclosures are wonderful in warmer weather, ask about requirements, remember they can climb and dig! 30-60 minutes several times a week of natural sunlight (no filtering) is beneficial for all skinks, especially young ones.

Soaking: Adults should always have access to a bowl into which they can easily go in and out (don't want them to drown though!) and be directly misted with bottled water once daily. Juveniles should have very shallow water containers (baby food jar lids) and be misted twice daily.

Diet: Blue tongue skinks are omnivores, eating about 40% animal matter and 60% plant matter. Pieces of food should be smaller than the skink's head is wide. Feed juveniles every other day and adults every 2-3 days. Allow skinks to eat as much as they want in a single sitting and remove the food as soon as they lose interest in it. Food should be varied and rotated to provide a more natural and balanced diet. Animal matter: insects (primarily crickets or wild-caught ones, avoid mealworms), pinkie and fuzzie mice, and pieces of hard boiled egg, and cooked ground turkey. Make sure any wild-caught food is pesticide free. DO NOT FEED FIREFLIES! They are POISONOUS! Insects should be housed separately from the skink, with only a few offered for feeding to avoid stress. Make sure some food is available for the crickets in the skink cage to avoid them feeding on the skink! Captive-raised insects need to be fed a gut-loading diet, such as T-rex. These insects should be misted in a zip-loc bag, then shake-and-baked with a calcium-only powder coating before feeding to the skink (we recommend using Tums crushed into a powder: avoid mixes with vitamins, especially vitamin D or phosphorus). Plant matter: dark leafy green vegetables to be offered include red leaf/green leaf/romaine/Boston lettuces, collard/mustard/beet greens, endive, parsley, bok choy (avoid iceberg lettuce as it has almost no nutritional value). Carrots, squash, beans, and peas can also be offered in smaller amounts. Skinks tend to love berries, small amounts of raspberries, black berries, or blue berries are good. Spinach, cabbage, broccoli and beet greens contain oxalates which bind calcium; kale, Brussel sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower bind iodine; thus all of these can be harmful if fed too much and should make up less than 10% of the diet combined. It is best to make a small "salad" to avoid picking and choosing. Tums can be sprinkled on this mixture as described above.

Sexing: Difficult. Males tend to be larger; have a larger/broader head, courting behavior; and have a hemipene bulge by the tail, and brighter more yellow eye color.

