



## Bearded Dragons

*Pogona vitticeps*

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Bearded dragons are native to deserts and arid forests of Australia. There are 7 species of bearded dragon. The most common in the pet trade is the inland dragon: *Pogona vitticeps*. However the eastern dragon : *Pogona barbata*, and the Rankin's dragon: *Pogona henrylawsoni*, are becoming more common as captive bred numbers increase. Bearded dragons 'gentle but interactive nature and relatively small adult size makes them excellent pets. The dragon's "beard" often turns dark when these animals are alarmed. They may also flatten out their bodies to appear larger, as a defense mechanism. Bearded dragons live 6-10 years or longer. They generally grow to be 18-22 inches long and weigh 300-475 grams. Handle bearded dragons by supporting under their belly.

**Health care:** Dragons can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend biannual exams, 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. House new dragons by themselves until cleared by your veterinarian, often a quarantine period of 45-90 days. These very active animals need a lot of space. The larger a cage the better, but the minimums recommended include 72" long x 16" wide x 17" high per adult. For multiple dragons, 8 square feet floor space for 3 adults is adequate. Large aquariums with screen tops often work well. Bearded dragons can be kept alone. They can also be kept in male/female pairs, or 1 male with a harem of females. Do not house males together as they will fight. Immature animals should be housed separately, as they are difficult to sex. If they must be housed together, only keep lizards of similar size together, as large bearded dragons may try to eat smaller ones! Use newspaper, paper bedding, or large rocks or artificial turf that cannot be ingested. The environment needs to stay very clean and dry for all dragons. Clean out feces and urine daily, wash out the entire enclosure monthly. Climbing objects are good to provide, but be sure they cannot collapse on the lizard. There is no good way to fully clean wooden items, and they should be periodically thrown away and replaced. A ceramic heat lamp should provide a focal basking spot of 100-115°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, as they are diurnal (awake during the day), 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 dragon 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 dragon. 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 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 dragons, especially young ones. Adults should be provided 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:** Bearded dragons are omnivores, eating more animal protein when younger (50% to 50%) and becoming more vegetarian as they age (10% animal, 90% plant, by 12-18 months of age). A variety of insects should be fed including dubia roaches, crickets, hornworms, and earthworms. Avoid mealworms and wax worms as they are mostly fat with limited nutritional value. Make sure any wild-caught food is pesticide free. Do not feed fireflies. They are poisonous! These items need to be rotated and varied, as occurs in the wild. Captive-raised insects need to be fed a gut-loading diet, such as Repashy Bug Burger. These insects should be misted in a zip-loc bag, then shake-and-baked with a calcium-only powder coating before feeding to the dragon (we recommend using Repashy SuperCal NoD). A pre-formed vitamin A supplement, such as Repashy Vitamin A Plus, or multivitamin supplement such as Repashy Supervite, may also be beneficial, given every 14 days. Insects should be housed separately from the dragon, with only a few offered for feeding to avoid stress. Make sure some food is available for the crickets in the dragon cage to avoid them feeding on the dragon! Often juveniles do best with a feeding station. Plant matter should be mostly dark leafy greens including: 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). Vegetable options include: carrots, squash, beans, and peas can also be offered in smaller amounts. Small amounts of raspberries, black berries, or blue berries can also be offered. 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" by chopping up and mixing greens and veggies, to avoid picking and choosing. Tums can be sprinkled on this mixture as described above. Insects can be fed 2-3 times weekly, prepared as previously described. A very occasional fuzzy or pinkie mouse can be fed once a month. Commercial diets can be fed, but are often not palatable to the dragon, and should not be more than 30% of the diet at any age.

**Sexing:** Males tend to be larger; have a larger or broader head; larger femoral pores; head bobbing behavior; and have a hemipene bulge by the tail. Sex is easier to distinguish after 5-6 months of age, when they should be 11-12, inches long. Females or submissive males often arm wave or bow to dominant males. Dominant females can "bulldoze" others from ideal basking sites.



