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Tegu

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Tegus are large and enigmatic lizards native to South America. They can live 15 to 20 years and reach about 5 feet in length, weighing as much as 35lb.

Species: Argentine black and white tegu: *Tupinambis merianae*, Argentine red tegu: tegu *Salvator rufescens*, Columbian black and white tegu: *Tupinambis teguixin*

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. Floor space of at least 3ft by 6ft for adults is necessary. A large box or cave hide is required. Tegus require a high humidity of 75-90%. For this reason, a substrate that holds moisture, is very helpful, examples include cypress mulch and coconut coir. Misting with an automated system or multiple times daily, is recommended. Note that substrate should not be saturated as this can predispose to skin infections. Tegus often enjoy digging, so a thick layer of substrate is needed, about 4 inches for hatchlings and 8 inches for adults. Observe the tegu to make sure it is not ingesting substrate. A heat lamp or ceramic heating element should provide a focal basking spot of 100-110F, while the rest of the cage should have a gradient down to 80F. Do not use hot rocks or pads as they can cause thermal burns. Make sure lights are off, at night, and allow the cage to cool down into the 70's. Use a digital thermometer to measure temperatures. 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!

Soaking: Should be done daily in a warm water bath for 30 minutes when less than 18 inches in length, then every third day when 18 inches has been exceeded to help with shedding. This stimulates defecation and helps prevent constipation. A small bowl of water for drinking should be provided.

More on the back!

Diet: Tegus are omnivores, feeding primarily on insects, in the wild with other occasional prey items include eggs and snails. Tegus do not typically eat rodents or mammals of any kind in the wild. We recommend the leaner, more natural proteins found in crickets, mealworms, hornworms, earthworms, lean ground turkey, eggs, snails, and dubia roaches. Small amounts of Mazuri Carnivorous Reptile Meal or high quality, low fat, canned dog food can be offered. If you are feeding rodents, be sure they are pre-killed as live rodents can bite and cause severe wounds. Make sure they prey is an appropriate size for the tegu. Hatchlings should be fed every 2-3 days and older tegus twice a week. Make sure any wild-caught food is pesticide free. 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. These can be mixed in with ground turkey or egg to encourage picky eaters to eat more greens and vegetables. These items should 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 tegu (we recommend Repashy SuperCal NoD). A multivitamin supplement, such as Repashy Supervite, may also be beneficial given every 14 days, as above. Obesity from the wrong food types is a huge problem in captivity. Occasionally hiding food provides enrichment and challenge for your pet.

Health care: Tegus 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 obesity, 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!

Handling: Tegus can range in temperament from docile to shy to quite aggressive. Particularly when new or not used to handling, they may puff-up or hiss. They have very strong jaws and can be difficult to persuade to let go of things they bite down on. A few drops of vinegar placed in the tegu’s mouth should cause it to release its grip. They may also whip their tails, if they become nervous. Captive bred tegus tend to be easier to handle.

