

# BEARDED DRAGONS CARE INFORMATION

CRESTEDGECKO.COM

Bearded Dragons are very easy and hardy pets as long as they are properly cared for. They have many positive qualities including relatively small size, good dispositions, long life, and wide range of feeding options. There are many different color morphs available that will fit anyone's tastes and budget. With proper care, most bearded dragons will live for 5- 7 years or more. Here is some general information about how to care for them:

**Acclimation:** Bearded Dragons do very well if they are properly acclimated once you receive them in order to reduce their stress. Stress may cause a bearded to go off-feed. It is important to reduce the animal's stress as quickly as possible. When they are moved to a new environment, they can become very stressed, especially if you have them shipped. Another factor is placing them in a strange environment. Bearded Dragons don't like change. They get used to their cage, heat, and light. Changing any or all of these can cause stress. Most breeders use plastic tubs or boxes to raise their dragons. They are relative inexpensive, unlikely to break or crack, and very space efficient for raising large numbers of babies. Most pet owners prefer to use glass tanks. Sometimes, beardeds don't adapt to glass very well when they are used to plastic. Here are ways to reduce a new bearded dragon's stress: 1: Keep your new bearded in it's own cage, away from any other dragons you have. Being placed with unfamiliar animals can be stressful because bearded dragons develop a social order that can easily be disrupted by the addition of a new animal. Also, all beardeds in a cage should be approximately the same size. Larger animals will dominate smaller ones, cause them to be stressed. It is also important that no more than one male be kept per cage. 2: Make sure the cage is warm enough. When beardeds are kept too cool, their metabolism slows down and they'll usually stop feeding. 3: Give them a hiding place. If beardeds know they have the option to hide, they will feel more secure. 4: Don't radically change their diet. Feed them the same food types they are used to eating. 5: If you use a glass tank, cover all four sides with black construction paper or cardboard. Beardeds may not feel secure if they can see everything going on in the room around them. Once a week, remove one side. After a month, all of the paper/cardboard will be removed.

**Cage Setup:** Baby and juvenile beardeds can be kept in a variety of enclosures. Most pet owners prefer to use an all glass aquarium or a custom cage built specifically for reptiles. The enclosure size for babies and juveniles should be about the size of a 20 gallon aquarium (30x12x12). Adults should be kept in an enclosure at least the size of a 40 gallon tank (36x18x16), preferably larger. If you have a large number of dragons, you may want to use plastic boxes or tubs.

**Substrate:** There are a variety of substrates that can be used and some that should be used with caution. Play sand is a popular type that seldom poses any problems. There are also several reptile specific sands that are sold in pet stores. Those are mainly calcium based products. Keep in mind that all sand type bedding do have risks. There's a chance that if a dragon ingests some of the sand while eating, it could cause intestinal blockage which may lead to death. Another option includes bark or woodchip bedding that is packaged for use with reptiles. Most of those will work fine. We use cypress mulch with our adult and juvenile dragons. It's relatively inexpensive, easy to replace as needed, and doesn't promote molding. It's important to keep the bedding clean and fresh and should be changed as needed. Newspaper is the safest substrate because it eliminates the possibility of ingestion. However, it can get messy when used with Beardeds and needs to be replaced almost daily. Branches and logs can be used as decoration and climbing areas for them. They should be very secure inside the cage so the dragon can't knock them down or crawl underneath and get stuck.

**Heating and lighting:** Since bearded dragons are diurnal and spend a lot of time basking, it's important to have a high light intensity and a warm basking area. Fluorescent UVB reptile bulbs can be placed overtop of the cage. At least one bulb should be used, preferably two. That will provide the bearded with enough visual light to simulate daylight. For heat, a basking lamp should be provided. This bulb can be used with a reflective clamp lamp and positioned above a basking site on one end of the cage. That way, the bearded can choose to be under the light or further away, depending on the temperature it requires at the time. It's important to give it the opportunity to decide for itself how warm it needs to be. The basking spot should be 100-110 degrees farenheight. Both basking lights and fluorescent lights should be on for about 12-13 hours a day. This can be accomplished by use of a timer, which can be purchased at any hardware or department store. If your room gets cool at night, a small under-tank heating pad can be used to provide a warmer area.

**Food/ Water/ and Supplements:** Bearded Dragons eat a wide variety of food types including insects, fruits, vegetables, and commercial pellets. Insects: Crickets, mealworms, and super worms are the most common types. The beardeds should only be fed as many as they can eat in a half hour or so. Too many crickets running around inside the cage will cause stress. They also lose much of their nutritional value if not eaten right away. Mealworms and superworms, unless you can find or produce extremely tiny ones, should be avoided until the bearded reaches subadult or adult size. They tend to be difficult to digest. Vegetables and fruits: Leafy greens such as leaf lettuce, kale, romaine, endive, and collard greens should make up the bulk of the dragon's vegetable diet. Most dragons will also sample other vegetables such as carrots, squash, green peppers, etc. They may also enjoy some fruit including apples, pears, strawberries, etc. This should make up a very small portion of the animal's diet. There are also several brands of commercial pellets available. These can make a great food source once the dragon is used to eating them. They may have to be mixed with the vegetables to disguise them initially.

Usually, pellets should be soaked in water for awhile to soften them up. One thing that is very important for baby and juvenile dragons is that the food item is no larger than 1/3 the size of the animal's head. If they eat food items that are too large, paralysis and death can result. Adults are much easier to feed. They can eat larger food items and will pretty much consume as much as you give them. All food types should be supplemented with calcium and multivitamins several times a week. The frequency depends of the type of supplement used. T Rex has an excellent line of species specific supplements. They are low potency so they are used with every feeding without the worry of over supplementation. One type is designed for use with crickets Bearded Dragons ICB). Another type is used to mix with vegetables (Bearded Dragon VMF or VGF). Both of these products are excellent and are highly recommended. Water: For babies and juveniles, keep a very shallow bowl or plastic jar lid available at all times. Make sure to place it in an area of the cage that is easy for the dragon to find. Change the water daily. Also, babies should be misted daily. Its best to do this after the lights have been on for an hour or so. Adults can have a deeper water bowl. This should also be changed daily. Dragons tend to mess up their water very frequently.

**Examples of a weekly feeding regimen for subadults or adults:** This is an example of a good feeding schedule. Of course, this is not set in stone and can be modified to fit your needs. For example, you may feed your dragon crickets once or twice a week, and offered them mealworms or pellets a couple more times a week. Also, if you have to go away for a day or two, you won't have to worry about feeding or watering. Just give the dragon fresh food and water before you leave. For more than 2 days, someone should check on it and offer fresh food and water.

Crickets (dusted with ICB): Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Vegetables (dusted with VMF): Tuesday, Saturday

Pellets: Thursday

Baby and juvenile bearded dragons should be offered crickets and finely diced greens daily. They have a fast metabolism and seem to always be hungry. This is extremely important if you are keeping several dragons in one cage. They tend to nip or chew on each other if not provided with enough food. This causes permanent damage to the nipped dragon and should be avoided if at all possible.

Under the conditions listed above, a hatchling bearded dragon can easily reach adult sizes of 15-19 inches in about one year.

**Sexing:** Males can be distinguished from females by the two large bulges at the base of the tail. These can be seen if you hold the dragon in the palm of your hand with the head facing away from you. Lift the tail up and look at the base. In most cases, the bulges on males can easily be seen. Females tend to be flat at the tail base. Males also can "blacken" their beards when excited or upset. Some females are also

able to do this, but not usually to the extent that males can. Another indicator is the size of the preanal pores on the underside of the hind legs. Male's pores are usually pretty well-developed while females are smaller. See the photos below for examples.

**Breeding:** Bearded Dragons are fairly easy to breed. It is best to raise males and females separately until they are mature. At that time, they can be placed together. Providing a 6-8 week cool-down can be helpful in stimulating breeding, but it usually isn't necessary. Males will normally start showing breeding behavior within minutes of being placed with a female. You'll see lots of head bobbing and black beards on the males. Females will tend to "arm wave".

**Egg-laying/ Hatching:** Females will usually lay eggs 4-6 weeks after being bred. They need a proper nesting spot. You can use a plastic storage box filled with 8-12 inches of moistened sand or soil (without added fertilizer). Make sure it is packed enough so the female can excavate a nest. After she lays eggs, they can be dug up, removed, and put into a plastic container with about 1-2 inches of perlite or coarse grade vermiculite. You should mix in water at about a 1:1 ratio by weight. Basically, it should be moist enough so that a handful packs when squeezed, but no water should drip out. It is very important that the perlite/vermiculite is not too wet. The eggs should be placed about 1 inch apart from each other. One or two tiny holes can be put in the side of the box for ventilation. Too much ventilation will dry the eggs. The container should then be placed in an incubator (Hovabators can be purchased at most reptile supply companies.) and kept at a constant 83-86 degrees. After 9-10 weeks, the baby dragons will emerge from the eggs. They can be kept in small groups, preferably 4-6 per cage. Babies will start feeding about 2 days after hatching. Feed babies 1/4 inch crickets dusted with calcium and vitamins as well as finely chopped leafy green such as kale, romaine, collard greens and leaf lettuce. Make sure each food item is smaller than the space between the bearded's eyes. Pieces that are too large can actually kill a baby bearded.

This information should be enough to get you started on successfully raising and breeding bearded dragons. For more information, please read "**The Bearded Dragon Manual**" by **Advanced Vivarium Systems**. They did an updated of the book a couple years ago that is just fantastic.