

Your New Bearded Dragon - A Guide to it's Care

By Rachel Maier MRCVS
Parkvets Veterinary Hospital

Congratulations on the new addition to your family. This is an exciting time for everyone and we hope that you will have many happy years together. This handout covers some of the basic facts about keeping a Bearded Dragon. Please read it carefully; if you have any further questions ask a member of staff.

Species name

Pogona vitticeps

Family relationships

Agamidae (agamid lizards): Sauria (lizards): Reptilia (reptiles).

Place of origin

Australia, although those now available are bred outside that country.

Housing

Bearded dragons are among the tamest of lizards, with outgoing personalities. They live for approx 10-11 years and grow to about 16-24 inches long. A pair of adult bearded dragons will require a cage at least 4' x 2' x 2', but 6' is a better length. A purpose-built vivarium with a screen lid is recommended. Dragons like to climb, so the cage must allow for some vertical movement as well as horizontal. Males should not be housed together.

Bearded dragons are active during the day, and require UVB from reptile-specific ultraviolet lighting which should be placed 12 inches above the dragon. The light should be on for 12 hours each day (a timer is useful). UV bulbs should be changed every 6-12 months as the spectrum changes over time. Being from hot dry regions, they also need a steady source of heat. This is best done with a heat source at one end of the tank so as to create a *thermal gradient*. An under tank heat mat can be left on at night to provide background heat. "Heat" rocks should be avoided.

Background temperature should be 76F at the cool end to 86F at the hot end with a basking area of 95-100F, preferably focused on a rock and/or branch so that the lizards can bask. Ideally several basking spots should be provided. At night the temperature can drop to about 65-70F. Use a thermometer at each end of the tank and also a hygrometer to measure humidity, which should be low (15-30%). A reptile thermostat will allow proper control of temperature.

The floor should be reptile sand or reptile grass carpet for adults, deep enough so that the dragons cannot easily feel the bottom of the cage. Juveniles though are better off on newspaper, paper towel or reptile grass carpet (without loops) as they tend to eat anything and can develop impactions of the digestive system. In addition a flat rock or two at the warm end will make excellent basking sites, and likewise a sturdy branch or two will allow the dragons to climb. A suitable shelter for each dragon is also necessary at the cooler end of the cage.

The cage should be kept in a draught free area and not beside a radiator. Also it should be away from bright lights late at night as these will disturb the lizards sleeping pattern. The tank should be cleaned with a suitable disinfectant once weekly.

Suggested Feeding Guidelines

Bearded dragons eat insects and will plant matter. No food offered should be bigger than the space between their eyes.

Juveniles should be fed 2-3 times daily and will eat 20-60 crickets daily. Fresh greens should also be offered. The crickets should be fed themselves with a suitable meal before being fed in turn to the dragons, usually 12-24 hours beforehand. The crickets should be dusted with a suitable supplement before being offered. Make sure that the crickets you offer are not too big for the dragons, particularly young ones, as feeding overlarge food can be fatal.

Adults can be fed once every 1-2 days. Each lizard should be offered about 6-10 crickets. Green leafy vegetables can be cut up and offered. They like to eat chicory, watercress, bok choy, courgettes, peas, apple, banana, kiwi and grapes. Avoid spinach, broccoli and kale and lettuce. Do not feed too much carrot as excess vitamin A can be toxic. Also avoid citrus fruits.

Chop the food into small pieces to avoid choking. For variety, adult bearded dragons can be offered mealworms, king mealworms and the occasional wax worm. Any uneaten prey should be removed.

Fresh water should be offered daily in a shallow bowl which should be disinfected weekly. They have difficulty recognising standing water, so making ripples or misting or dropping water on their nose will enable them to drink. Misting will also aid shedding.

Handling

Bearded dragons tolerate more handling than many lizards, although this should not be overdone. Nodding the head is a sign of dominance; arm waving is a sign of submissive behaviour. Sitting with an open mouth is their way of cooling down. Beware of taking them outdoors; sunlight may trigger different behaviour in a formerly tame lizard. Children under five should not handle a lizard. Always wash your hands after handling any reptile.

Miscellaneous

Bearded dragons are considered one of the best pet lizards and also very suitable for first-time keepers. As a rule one male per cage, optionally with 1-2 females, is a good start. For additional reading try "General Care and Maintenance of Bearded Dragons" by Philippe de Vosjoli, [ISBN-10: 1882770404](#).

Emergency Service

The practice has a vet on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In the event of an emergency, day or night, you should always telephone your local branch and you will be given the appropriate information on how to contact the emergency vet. Alternatively call the emergency number on 02083008111.

And Finally

We hope that you will have lots of fun and pleasure from your new pet over the coming years. We trust it will enjoy good health and hope we can help you achieve this.

Should you need further advice about the health or welfare of your bearded dragon then please contact us at the practice.

Special Offer for Ruxley Manor Garden Centre Customers

For your peace of mind Parkvets have teamed up with Ruxley Manor Garden Centre to offer you a 10% discount on your Bearded Dragon's first health check up. Visit our website at www.parkvets.com to find a Parkvets clinic near you.

You should obtain a voucher from Ruxley Manor Garden Centre and present it plus your receipt to Parkvets to claim your discount.

