

THE GREEN IGUANA

Common Name: Green Iguana.

Scientific Name: Iguana iguana.

Order: Squamata. **Family:**
Iguanidae.

Description:

Size

5' - 6' Total Length.

Life span (Captive)

The normal life expectancy of a healthy Iguana is around 15 years.



Origin

Central & South Americas.

Habitat

The Green Iguana is an arboreal lizard which inhabits the tropical rain forests of South and Central America at reasonably low altitudes of up to 1,000 meters, (High altitudes are too cold).

Temperament

Newly acquired animals can be very defensive and may bite, scratch and tail whip. Both sexes can and should be handled frequently to help with taming, will sometimes struggle to get out of your hands, but are also known to actually enjoy being stroked or rubbed on the body and will sometimes sit still for a while and accept this petting.

Care should be taken during breeding season when behaviour can be erratic. It would be common sense to avoid the facial area. Avoid leaving Iguanas with young children and keep your eyes on them at all times around fingers arms legs or feet. After handling, as with any pet ..wash hands thoroughly.

Captive Care

Caging:

Use full spectrum 5% "UVB" lighting around 12 hours per day, this mimics natural sunlight. Use a special reptile tube light, and not the cheaper Plant Gro-Lux type which are of no use.

Provide a Spot light for a basking area with access to a cooler area. (Temperature gradient).

Supply branches and logs for climbing and exploring, making sure there is nothing the Iguana could trap or snag his claws on. Heating pads can help maintain the required temperature from below.

In captivity, adult Iguanas require a Habitat, Compound, Den, Vivarium , call it what you will, of at least 6' x 5' x 4'. (This would need to be even larger if you have a full grown Iguana) more space is better if possible.

Substrate:

Sand, bark, wood chippings etc can all be ingested with resulting impaction! (the only safe loose substrate that is totally digestible is alfalfa pellets.....Lino, carpet, paper and astroturf are all safe to use.

Temperature:

Daytime temperature should be: Basking area around 85-95 degrees F. Cool area 75-85 degrees F.

Night temperatures can fall to around 70 degrees, even perhaps as low as 60 F, as long as they have somewhere to warm up in the morning.

Extra care should be taken during times of power cuts / failure, try to give this some thought so you are prepared if need be. Basking area temp may be a little higher, as long as the Iguana is able to move to a cooler spot to thermoregulate.

Hot rocks should NOT be used to help with temperature regulation, these have been known to over heat and the resulting hot spots may cause burns on reptiles, leading to disfigurement or even death.

Humidity:

Iguanas being from the tropics require high humidity. The ideal 80% is difficult to obtain and even 50% can be difficult. The humidity can be raised by having a wide pan of water in the habitat and regular spraying of the Iguana with a bottle sprayer, some people with large habitats even have waterfalls and humidifiers installed.... having a high humidity helps with the shedding of the Iguana's skin, on the downside it can also aid growth of moulds! so it is a matter of finding a happy medium.

Lighting:

Iguanas need UVB light to convert Vitamin D into its active form; in its active form it then assists in the absorption of calcium into the body. Sunlight -or in the absence of it, at least 12 hours of full spectrum light (UVB) -is required daily to ensure your pet remains healthy ...(most popular are the 5% UVB tubes)

Food:

Iguanas are HERBIVORES. Feed up to 50% of: leafy greens, collards, mustard greens, turnip greens, nasturtiums (leaves & flowers), dandelions (leaves & flowers), escarole, parsley, leeks, hibiscus leaves and flowers and carrot tops. Up to 35% of: green beans, zucchini, squash, bean sprouts, okra, grated carrot, red yellow or green bell peppers (sweet peppers), peas, cucurbits, parsnips and celery.

Around 10% of: fruits such as papayas, blackberries, kiwi, peach, banana, grapes, plums, oranges, clementines, satsumas, mango's, apples, figs, strawberries, pear, cherry, melons, fuchsia fruits and rose hips. Up to 5% from the occasional foods below:

The following contain "oxalates" and should **not** be fed in large quantities: chard, spinach, rhubarb stems (leaves are toxic), dock, sorrel, beets and beet greens.

The following contain "goitrogens", so same as above, feed in small quantities only: cabbage, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, brussel sprouts and bok choy.

Note, bread, pasta, and rice are grain foods and may be offered once or twice a week as treats.

Water requirements:

Iguanas like to bathe, so a large pool/bath should be provided several times a week. Clean drinking water should always be available

Social Structure:

Males can be territorial, and usually do better kept separate from other males. Females will tend to ignore each other and one male with one or two females, or two females together can sometimes be successful.

Activity period:

Strictly diurnal (active in the daytime).

Sexing:

Exact sexing especially in juveniles is difficult and can only be done with certainty by someone with veterinarian experience, by probing the cloacal vent.

However the characteristics that develop as they get older are:

In males...usually larger heads, dewlaps and subtympanic scales; the femoral pores which are a row of glands along the underside of the thighs are much larger and more pronounced in males, and also exude a waxy substance that is used to spread the scent around, also erratic behaviour during breeding season which may consist of biting, nipping and sometimes aggression but note this behaviour is not shown in all males.

For females, generally the opposite of the above ...smaller dewlaps, heads and subtympanic scales; the rows of femoral pores are just small dots, and in breeding season they sometimes start digging or scratching as if looking for somewhere to lay eggs. They may become gravid and actually lay eggs but these would be sterile if no male has been in attendance.

Miscellaneous information:

An iguana cannot generate its own body heat, and so must thermoregulate, by moving in and out of hot and cooler spots (gradients) to maintain the correct temperature. Hence the different temperature zones indicated in TEMPERATURE above.

Suitability as an Exotic Pet

The ownership of a Green Iguana is not to be taken lightly and certainly not to be just purchased on a whim. They are not too difficult to look after, but do need some care and attention and can run to some expense with special lights for UVB, basking and heating.

A large habitat is also required for all but the very young Iguana....So to summarize, the Green Iguana is not a beginner's or young child's pet, but for someone with the time, care and funds available, it can be the making of a good few years of enjoyment

Things to Consider

Who will look after your pet if you are away ? Are you prepared to take on a pet for over 15 years? Is the rest of the family happy to live with a large lizard? Are you prepared to deal with the sudden change in temperament during the breeding season? Can you afford all the food, equipment, vet's bills etc?

References / Suggested Reading:

Two excellent books on the market today for reference are:

"Green Iguana-The ultimate owners manual" by James W Hatfield 111, Dunthorpe press.

ISBN ref 1-883463-48-3

"Iguanas for Dummies" by Melissa Kaplan, IDG books

ISBN ref 0-7645-5260-0

Also, Melissa Kaplan has what is probably the most extensive site on the Web, with probably every Iguana subject covered at: www.Anapsid.org