

# Caring for your bearded dragon

**How to keep pet bearded  
dragons healthy and happy**



**Notcutts**

GARDEN INSPIRATION SINCE 1897

# Caring for your bearded dragon



## Are bearded dragons right for me?

Bearded dragons are very rewarding pets and make an ideal first pet reptile. If you take good care of him he can live for up to 10 years. Even though bearded dragons are very calm, they are more suited to older children and adults because they are delicate and handling of them must be gentle.

Bearded dragons are easy to look after if their specific needs are met. They have lots of character, are docile and friendly and are easy to handle. Most bearded dragons will become tame with regular interaction.

Originally from Eastern Australia, bearded dragons get their name from a pouch under their neck which inflates or turns black when they feel threatened. In the wild bearded dragons live in rocky areas and love to climb and bask in the sun. They can grow up to 45cm including their long tail.

## Choosing a new pet bearded dragon

When selecting your bearded dragon, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Strong, sturdy tail
- Active (in their normal calm state it might be hard to tell so offer food and see what he does)
- Alert and awake during the day
- Bright eyes
- Good appetite for crickets and vegetables
- Formed droppings

## The first few days

We advise buying and setting up your vivarium for at least a week before bringing your new bearded dragon home. This gives you time to get used to setting the temperature just right to create the ideal environment for him to settle in.

When you bring him home, carefully allow your dragon to climb into the vivarium. Leave him, with some water, for 48 hours to settle into his new home. He needs time to get used to his new surroundings and will require as little stress as possible.

We recommend that you keep handling to a minimum during the first week until he is more comfortable in his new home.

## Creating a happy home

Bearded dragons need an escape-proof vivarium with good ventilation and with lengths of apparatus to climb on.

The minimum size of a vivarium for an adult should be 122cm x 60cm x 60cm for a single animal, but larger for a pair or a trio.

## Heating and lighting

All reptiles are cold blooded and therefore rely on an external heat source to maintain their body temperature.

Bearded dragons need a range of temperatures in their vivarium. Heat should be at one end of the vivarium allowing your bearded dragon to warm up while the other end should stay cool.

You will need a thermometer at each end of the vivarium to monitor this range. The



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cooler end should be a temperature of 20°C and 34°C at the heated end. This should be controlled with a good quality thermostat that is designed to be used with a heat mat. The heat mat can be placed at the bottom or on the back of the vivarium with the hot spot provided through a spotlight. The temperature can be dropped to a minimum of 15°C at night for adults, providing that the temperature is hot enough during the day.

Bearded dragons have difficulty feeling heat through their stomachs so a heat mat must have a thick layer of substrate over it to stop the bearded dragon sitting too long on it.

A light cycle of 12 hours daylight and 12 hours night time can be achieved by using a timer switch so the lights and heating come on and go off automatically.

Strong UVB lighting is needed to allow bearded dragons to fully absorb and utilise the calcium in their diet. This lighting can be provided using fluorescent tubes (which should be replaced every 6 months) or by using UVB spot bulbs.

Your bearded dragon will suffer if there is too much humidity and poor ventilation so it is important that this is controlled and monitored precisely.

## Decoration

The floor of their vivarium should be covered with a layer of calci sand, beech chips, or artificial grass. Build up an area for your lizard to bask under the spotlight or UV heat lamp with climbing rocks and branches. They will also need places to hide such as caves and crevices which can be created using bark.

## Cleaning

Water and food bowls should be washed, dried and refilled and any droppings or uneaten food removed every day.

The whole vivarium will need to be completely cleaned out and disinfected regularly, replacing the bottom layer of sand or beech chips each time.

Kitchen sinks should not be used for bathing reptiles or cleaning reptile's dishes or vivariums. If bathtubs are used for these activities, they should be cleaned thoroughly with disinfectant.

## A healthy diet and treats

Bearded dragons are omnivores and become more vegetarian as they grow into adulthood.

They like a varied diet of live insects, fruit and vegetables.

Young bearded dragons should be fed insects up to 3 times a day, with a quarter of their diet being made up of fruit and vegetables. Don't forget that if you are feeding livefood this will also need feeding, giving them fruit and vegetables that your bearded dragon eats is a good option, but you can buy specific bug grub instore.

Adults should be fed 4 to 5 times a week, with half of their diet made up of fruit and vegetables. Once their growth slows, your lizard's appetite will reduce and they will need to be fed only 3 to 4 times a week.

A healthy diet would be animal protein made up of crickets, locusts, or giant

mealworms. Feed only as many insects as your bearded dragon will eat, as excess, uneaten insects will annoy them.

Insects should be dusted with a mineral and vitamin supplement to ensure enough calcium and vitamins are available in their diet.

Shallow food and water bowls should be used for bearded dragons. Babies don't drink well from a water bowl and should be sprayed lightly each day.

Treat them now and then with wax worms which are high in fat.

## Getting to know you

Smaller dragons can be delicate and children should always be supervised when handling them.

Your movements should be slow and gentle but confident. You can pick up your lizard by cupping him gently in both hands and supporting his whole body.

Always wash your hands before and after handling your bearded dragon.



## Bearded dragons and other pets

Males can become territorial and should be separated from other males. Females will live happily with other females.

## Bearded dragon skin shedding

Baby bearded dragons may completely shed their skin once every month in the first year. Their skin will fall off in small pieces so they may look slightly shabby for a while. Avoid the temptation to pick this off as it can damage new scale growth.

## Potential health issues with bearded dragons

### Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea can be caused by incorrect feeding or an internal parasite infestation. Seek veterinary advice if diarrhoea is present.

### Overgrown nails

Nails sometimes may become overgrown and will need to be trimmed. Please ask our pet centre team for advice on nail trimming.

### Respiratory problems

Symptoms of this will include fluid or mucus from the nose. Seek veterinary advice if you see these signs.

### Bone disorders

This usually happens because of a lack of calcium and/or vitamin D3. Symptoms include twisted or twitching hind legs, or a

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soft or undershot jawbone. Unfortunately, this damage cannot be reversed but the condition can be stabilised if caught and treated early and correctly.

## Impaction

Impaction comes from eating large amounts of substrate by accident when feeding live food. Symptoms include loss of appetite and lethargy with reluctance to move around. Consult a vet if you have any concerns.

## Finding a vet

If you have any worries about your bearded dragon, please consult your local vet as soon as possible. All vets have a basic understanding of reptiles, but a reptile specialist may be worth finding just in case.

## Pet insurance for your bearded dragon

You can insure your bearded dragon under an exotic pet insurance plan in the UK. We always recommend taking pet insurance wherever possible.

## Your new pet checklist

- Vivarium
- Heat mat or lamp
- Lamp protector
- Thermometers x 2
- Food and water bowl
- Live foods
- Bug grub
- Bug gel
- Vitamin / calcium supplement
- Disinfectant
- Sand
- UVB tube or UVB heat lamp
- Silver reflector for tubes
- Thermostats
- Cage decorations: branches, rocks, hidey holes, caves, plants

# Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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