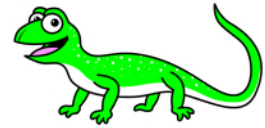




Mike's Beardededs

Bearded Dragon Care sheet



Introduction: Welcome to the world of owning Bearded Dragons! If you are reading this, you likely have purchased a Bearded Dragon from me and are looking to get as much information on your new pet as you can. In this care sheet, I am going to try to explain the basics that work *for me*. These are the *basics* and there are multiple exceptions, but this is what seems to work based on my years of experience and research.

Basic needs: The Bearded Dragon is an Agamid lizard from the arid regions on Australia. They like their environment to be somewhat dry and warm, with a hot area to bask in the light. Adult lizards usually are about the size of an adult's hand, minus their head and tail. An adult can easily be as long as your forearm and hand and be a nice, plump handful. Babies can easily sit on your finger, but will grow to adult size within the first 1-2 years if fed well. Beardededs are Omnivorous, meaning they eat both live foods and plants. As a baby or juvenile, they will require more protein to grow, so bugs and insects will be their primary source of food. These lizards like to climb and are active during the day. Most have a lifespan of around ten years in captivity.

Cage requirements: For caging I always recommend the largest cage you can afford to put them in right away. They will grow fast so they need the size to grow into. I use large plastic totes that are open on the top which is simple, but I understand most people want a visually appealing aquarium set up. I recommend at *least* a 29 gallon or 20 gallon "long" aquarium for a single dragon. This is still on the small side. A 40 gallon "breeder" size is a much better overall choice. A screen top (or open top if no cats or other pets) to allow plenty of ventilation. Beardededs like to climb, but as babies, you don't want them getting up *too* high, as falling is a real danger while really young. I use porcelain or ceramic tiles laid upside down to expose the rough bottom on top placed at an angle to get up to their basking spot. This is a simple and very effective way to keep your dragon's claws trimmed down as they will scratch them on the tile every time they run across it. The underside of the tile also seems to hold heat good for basking. For the substrate (bottom of the cage) I have used everything from sand to newspaper. Many people are very against sand, and there are some good reasons to be, but I have used it successfully for years. Nowadays though, I simply use newspaper for ease of cleaning and to cut down on dust generated from the sand. Paper towels work also, but smaller dragons sometimes get their small little

nails caught in the paper towels while running after food items. Newspaper is cheap and easy, but visually it looks boring. Cage carpet can also be used successfully if kept dry and free of bacteria and mold.

Lighting: This is the single most important thing I stress. Your new dragon HAS to have UVB full spectrum lighting to grow properly. Without unfiltered sunlight like they would have in the wild, Bearded Dragons WILL develop metabolic bone disease and will become sick. They require the sun's rays to process different vitamins and nutrients to grow, and once we keep them indoors, we have to substitute that lighting somehow. The best way is with a fluorescent (the long tube bulbs that don't generate heat) light fixture with a very specific bulb. I recommend a "10.0" full spectrum T5 high output bulb designed specifically for reptiles. The bulb alone usually costs around \$20. A fixture might be around the same price. Zoo Med makes several good bulbs perfect for this. This light is only to provide the full spectrum lighting needed to process vitamins and nutrients, it is not a basking light. You will need a basking light also, but you can go cheap for this. I usually purchase a cheap dome style work light fixture at a hardware store with the porcelain sockets. I then just put a cheap incandescent (NOT LED as these don't produce heat) flood bulb in there to heat up the basking spot. This fixture and bulb may need to be adjusted to get the right temperature for the lizard to bask comfortably. The bigger the tank, the bigger the wattage you can use (because a big bulb in a small tank will likely heat it up too high and cook your new pet). A 65 watt flood bulb is usually a good bulb size if the tank isn't unusually small. Place the heat light on one side of the cage, usually sitting on top of the screen top over the basking site. It can be 4-8 inches from the spot, but if it's too far away the lizard won't be able to get warm enough to digest food and grow. If you angle the tile like I mentioned earlier up to the basking spot, the lizard can get closer and closer until it finds that "sweet spot" where it is the perfect happy temperature. With time you will learn what your lizard likes. If it's directly under the light all the time, it might be a little too far away, but if it's a few inches away from the center it might be either just right, or too hot. Build up the basking spot to the light, don't adjust the light on the top of the cage. You want that heat directed into the enclosure keeping it warm. Your goal is to warm the cage up and have a very hot basking spot hotter than the rest of the cage. 110 degrees at the hot spot is a pretty good temp to be around.

Diet: This can get as extravagant as you want it to. The main thing to remember is a baby dragon needs more protein than an adult. As a baby, I think a general rule of thumb is 80% protein, 20% veggies and fruits. We will discuss the protein foods first.

Bugs and insects. This will be your primary source of food. My favorite three foods for my dragons are Dubia Roaches, Superworms, and crickets.....in that order. Dubia roaches, while more expensive than the other choices, are also the easiest to keep and breed yourself, and are the healthiest food you can offer. I keep several colonies of these bugs and they are surprisingly clean and easy. They are fed a

mixture of fruits, vegetables, and dry food that I provide them so I know exactly what my dragons are getting when they eat the roaches. Crickets are the most common food source available and are easily obtained from almost any pet shop or bait shop. Crickets are good, but aren't as nutritious as a Dubia Roach. Superworms are also pretty easy to obtain and can even be bought online in bulk and are easy to keep alive for months.

With feeding insects you should always offer bugs that are an appropriate size. A large cricket is way too big for a month old dragon. If you aren't sure on size, some people recommend basing the insect size off the distance between your bearded's eyes on top of their head. Any insect greater than that distance between the eyes might be too large for your lizard. Most pet shops sell "large" and "small" crickets, and smalls are usually perfect for a bearded dragon under 6 months of age. As they grow you will learn what sizes are good for your baby.

I also recommend a quality calcium dust for dusting your bugs prior to feeding them to your bearded. A small can of calcium powder costs just a few dollars at any pet shop and will last you the lifetime for your lizard. Simply put a shake or two in a cup or bag before putting insect feeders in there and shake the bugs around until they appear powdery white. You can do this several times a week so your dragon gets plenty of the needed calcium for bone development.

While your dragon will love chasing bugs, a variety of veggies and fruits should be offered regularly. While this may only be 20% of a young dragon's diet, it's an important one. The majority of what I feed includes dark, leafy greens. Kale, mustard, collard, turnip and dandelion greens are my rotating staple. I stay away from lettuce, cabbage and spinach. You can also try squash, apples, carrots, strawberries and other fruits, but don't overdo the fruits. For baby dragons, I will cut the veggies up really fine and offer them early in the morning, trying to get the dragon to eat the greens while hungry. A dragon will almost always pass on greens if they can eat bugs instead. So I offer greens first and a while later offer bugs. Most of my dragons that I produce happily eat greens when offered. Remember you can also sprinkle calcium powder on the greens.

Bearded Dragons should have frequent or constant access to fresh water. Most people use water bowls that are changed out for fresh water regularly. Bearded dragons will sometimes soak in their water and usually will defecate in it. If you choose to not keep a water bowl in the cage at all times, misting is a good option. Dragons will usually drink while being sprayed down and usually enjoy this. The occasional luke warm bath, especially during shedding cycles, will be enjoyed. I usually do "bath day" while cleaning cages outside during the summer. A tub with water no deeper than the shoulders of the dragon can be

used. I also use this time to scrub the dragons down gently with an old toothbrush, especially on their feet and underside.

Co-habitation: This will be a controversial subject. Bearded dragons *can* be kept in pairs or groups. This doesn't mean that if you keep a pair of them together they will both thrive and do well. Usually, with two dragons living together, one will grow a little faster and eat a little more. The key to keeping more than one dragon in a cage is to give them plenty of room, and paying attention to what they are telling you. If one starts to be more dominant, you might need to change up the tank some to break up territories already established. Maybe a couple different basking spots offered. I have kept up to 6 adults in one cage together with no issues. One male and 5 females did great for me, but I kept them well fed and they seemed very happy together.

The most likely scenario to see aggression between dragons is when you have more than a male together and they are reaching sexual maturity, especially if a female is in there with them. Males will fight other males to get that female. Usually though, having a pair together you won't have too many issues. Many people are against keeping dragons together but I think they do pretty good in groups or pairs as adults. The key to success is keeping them well fed and giving them plenty of room.