

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) Care Plan

Green iguanas are large arboreal folivorous lizards from South America. They can live for 30 years and grow to over a metre in length.

Suitability as Pets

Green Iguanas are not 'pets' in the traditional sense – they do not naturally like being handled or played with and indeed this can be extremely stressful for them. They have specific husbandry requirements and should only be kept by those willing to adequately provide for their needs. However, Iguanas are beautiful and fascinating animals and can be a challenge for the keeper. Captive bred animals should be purchased from a reputable dealer – wild caught specimens are more likely to be stressed and to carry internal parasites, and by buying these individuals you will be contributing to the importation of this vulnerable species from the wild.

Iguanas often do well when housed with other iguanas. Iguanas generally do not like dogs. Larger iguanas may get along fine with cats once they are big enough to teach the cat some respect. Very small birds, such as finches, may view iguanas with some alarm. While rodents are unlikely to be considered as a form of sushi on the run by a properly fed and raised iguana, mice may be stressed out by an iguana. There are always exceptions to the rules.

Sexing & Reproduction

In males the femoral pores are more pronounced and there are bulges due to the presence of hemipenes at the base of the tail.

Females have smaller dorsal spines, smaller operculum scales and smaller femoral pores.

Male iguanas know when human females are going through their monthly cycles. Iguana males may attack menstruating human females.

Housing

Iguanas need large vivariums or preferably converted rooms with plenty of branches for climbing. A min/max thermometer and humidity dial should be used to monitor the temperature range and humidity respectively.

Lighting

Iguanas need ultraviolet B light for vitamin D synthesis and calcium metabolism. While this is best provided by access to natural sunlight, this is obviously not a practical option in Britain. Light sources such as Powersun (Zoomed) Iguana light, Reptisun (Zoomed) Sun-glo or Life-glo lights are suitable. Most lights must be replaced regularly as their UVB output declines rapidly after 6-9 months.

Heating/ Temperature

Their preferred temperature zone (POTZ) is 29-35°C or 85-92°F. To stimulate appetite and digest their food, iguanas should have access to a basking area that remains at 30-35°C (88-92°F) for about 12 hours a day.

The rest of the enclosure should have a temperature gradient from 30-35°C at the hot spot to 25°C at the coolest area during the day.

Iguanas over 2 years old can tolerate night time drops to 20°C, but for younger iguanas the lowest temperature should be 25°C.

Furniture (Climbing and shelter)

Iguanas benefit from a climbing arboreal setup. Basking areas should be elevated and branches and plastic leaf structures are suitable

Rocks or logs can be used to create hiding places or purpose built hide boxes can be used.

Provide branches to climb, rocks to bask upon, and shelter to hide in. Ideally a rock and or branch will be placed under the heat/UV lamp. Hardy plants like sansevieria, aloe, palms, and cycads may be used.

Water /Humidity

Iguanas require a high level of humidity; around 80-90%.

Fresh water should be provided daily in a container large enough to permit bathing and the iguana sprayed daily with warm water.

Most Iguanas prefer to defecate during a soak. Daily immersion helps improve the iguana's overall hydration status, a critical factor in kidney health.

Diet / Feeding

Hatchlings and juveniles should be fed daily. Mature iguanas can be fed every other day.

An iguana's diet should be 70% leafy greens, 20% vegetables and only 10% fruit. Iguanas must be offered a mixture of food items that have the correct calcium: phosphorus ratio. It is vital to provide as much variety as possible and not to rely on a few easily available items only.

Organic and pesticide free produce is recommended. Iguanas are best regarded as vegetarian and so should not be fed high protein food such as egg, cheese, meat or cat/dog food.

It is best to feed iguanas in the morning rather than the evening. Food should be at room temperature with components well mixed and in bite-sized pieces. It is important not to put down so much food that it is impossible to tell whether the iguana has eaten any or not! Complete iguana pelleted diets are available, however they are not recommended as the sole/main food for an iguana.

Leafy greens:

Use two or more of the following greens daily – dandelion (including flowers), watercress, mustard cress, parsley, kohlrabi, escarole, collard, turnip greens, endive, Chinese leaves (eg pak/bok

choi), beet greens, carrot tops, romaine, kale, spinach, cabbage, hibiscus, nasturtium or geranium leaves/petals, brussels sprouts, broccoli leaves. Of these, kale, cabbage, spinach, broccoli and brussels sprouts should not be given more than once a week. Do not give iceberg lettuce at all as it lacks nutrients, has a poor calcium:phosphorus ratio and iguanas often become hooked on them to the exclusion of other greens. Rhubarb should also never be used.

Vegetables:

A basic vegetable salad can be made up weekly and stored in an air-tight container in the fridge. Suitable vegetables include parsnip, green beans, courgettes, peas (and pods), mange-tout, bean sprouts, asparagus, carrots, squash, sweet potato, peppers, turnip, and okra. Vegetables should be shredded, grated or finely chopped and mixed thoroughly together.

Fruit:

Fruits which can be given in small quantities include figs, raspberries, strawberries, papaya, mango, pears, plums, apricots, grapes, soaked raisins and kiwi (skinned). Tomatoes, bananas and apples should be used only very occasionally (if at all), as they have a poor calcium:phosphorus ratio.

Food Dusting/ Vitamin Supplementation

The use of a high calcium and multivitamin supplement such as Nutrobal (Vetark) is recommended

Preventative Care & Disease Management

Always wash your hands (preferably with an antiseptic soap) before or after handling any reptile. For animals in veterinary environment we advise the use of disposable gloves (to control RAS).

Quarantine new reptiles for at least 3 months. During this time record normal patterns of eating, defaecating, weight gain and behaviour and have them examined by a vet.

It is a good idea to take along a fresh faecal sample so that the vet can check for the presence of gastrointestinal parasites.

Veterinary advice should be sought if your chameleon is not eating or producing faeces, is inactive, has swellings, particularly around the eyes, is losing weight or has a discharge from its eyes, nose or mouth.

Accidents and injuries can happen, both to the reptile and the reptile handler. Not only can bites happen, but also there are diseases that can be transmitted between animals - and that means between reptiles and humans.

Keepers should be ware of the prevention of reptile associated salmonellosis (RAS).

Good hygiene is essential, not only to your pet's health, but to your own.

Reptiles can be non- symptomatic carriers of Salmonella, bacteria that cause sometimes lethal food poisoning.

Children, the aged, and those who are immune-compromised are particularly susceptible to Salmonella from any source.

There are measures you can take to minimize risk:

- After handling your pet reptile, wash your hands with soap for at least 30 seconds, or use hand disinfectant.
- Disinfect any area you used to clean cages, dishes and do not use this area for food preparation.
- Use separate cleaning utensils, not the sponge you use to wash your own dishes.
- Reptiles are NOT recommended if you're pregnant or have a young child or an immuno-compromised person in your home.
- Don't kiss a reptile pet.