



Bearded Dragon

Pogona vitticeps

Bearded dragons are agamid lizards belonging to the genus *Pogona*; There are seven species, of which the most common in the pet trade is the *P. vitticeps*, or inland bearded dragon. Bearded dragons live in the arid, rocky, semi-desert regions of Australia. Due to the highly restrictive export laws of Australia, almost all pet dragons in the United States have originated from founder animals imported from Europe. These lizards do not get very large, and with their wonderful personality and quizzical nature, typically make for a great “pet” lizard.



Young bearded dragons

Basic Care:

Habitat: The minimum amount of space needed for an adult bearded dragon should be equivalent to a 50 gallon aquarium, although bigger is always better. Babies can be started out in aquaria as small as 10 gallons. Substrate used for babies and juveniles is usually paper towels; adults can be housed on any number of substrates, including paper, reptile carpet, sand (although some keepers adamantly condemn sand, particularly the fine silica sand), and rabbit pellets. Bearded dragons have an active metabolic rate, so plan on cleaning often. Most dragons (esp. adults) will appreciate a well-decorated enclosure, with ample opportunities to climb and bask. This can be accomplished with any number of decorations, including rocks, driftwood, etc. Be careful if you use any type of loose substrate when decorating, as many dragons will try to dig under their cage furnishings and can become trapped or be crushed if said furnishings are not well-placed and secure.

Bearded dragons need both UVA and UVB spectrum lighting to survive. Without UVB, dragons (and many other reptiles) cannot produce vitamin D3, which is used to properly metabolize calcium. Lack of D3 can lead to a crippling disorder known as Metabolic Bone Disease. Proper amounts of UVB can only be obtained through natural sunlight (unfiltered), and a few select reptile specialty bulbs.

Heating is another important element of a bearded dragon’s habitat. A correct temperature is critical to healthy growth. Dragons must become warm enough to properly digest their food, which means providing a basking area of 95-105 degrees. The temperature gradient can range from these high basking temperatures into the mid-70’s. This is generally created through the use of lights, although many keepers will use an under-tank heater in addition to proper lighting, especially for night-time heating.

Diet: Bearded dragons are omnivorous, consuming both insects and plant matter. Dragons should be offered fresh greens and vegetables every day. Juveniles should be offered insects at least once a day; adult dragons can go days and sometimes even weeks without insects, although most keepers offer them a couple times weekly. Dry diets are also available, but should be fed sparingly and in addition to fresh foods if used at all. Also, most dragons will not drink from a dish. Babies will often drink when sprayed with a bottle, and this should be done a couple times daily. Adults get almost all the moisture they need from their fresh foods, but often appreciate an occasional misting or warm bath.