



## Spinytail Iguanas

*Ctenosaura spp.*

Ctenosaurs, or spinytailed iguanas, are a group of lizards currently consisting of 13 different species, the most common in the pet trade being *C. pectinata*, *C. similis*, and *C. quinquecarinata*. These lizards are native to Mexico and the Central Americas, often inhabiting ruins and rocky crevices. The Spiny-tailed iguanas tend to be nasty and not tameable like their bigger, green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) cousins. Juveniles are mostly green, with their adult coloring coming on during their first year. The adult ground color is dark brown-to-gray or black, depending upon the species/subspecies. The tail is ringed with specialized spiny scales. While the *C. similis* has a tall dorsal crest, the other species tend towards very short crests. These animals in the wild are usually found in groups dominated by a male.



Adult female *C. similis*

### Basic Care:

**Habitat:** Provide a cage large enough for the iguana to grow in! Cage size will depend on the particular species. The larger species such as *similis* and *pectinata* should have a minimum adult cage size of 4X4X3ft. Avoid particulate substrates such as wood chips and sand; such substrates are well-known for causing impactions in iguanas, resulting in expensive surgery or death. Substrates of choice include newspaper, butcher paper, linoleum, and reptile carpet. A spinytailed iguana's cage should be outfitted with many ways to climb, as well as at least 2 hides. Fresh drinking water should always be available, although humidity is not as critical of a concern as with green iguanas.

Iguanas need both UVA and UVB spectrum lighting to survive. Without UVB, iguanas (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 an iguana habitat. Spinytail iguanas should be provided with a basking spot of 95-100 degrees, with ambient temps of 75-80. Nighttime temperatures can drop into the low 70's. These temperatures are generally achieved through the use of basking lights, ceramic heat emitters, radiant heat panels, or any combination of the above.

**Diet:** Young spinytails in the wild were found to be primarily insectivorous, evolving into more herbivorous habits as adults. Under a year of age, a wide variety of insects can be offered (crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, etc.) several times weekly, with a vegetarian salad being available every day. As adults, the diet should be predominately vegetarian, (~80%) of dark leafy greens such as collard, dandelion, turnip, mustard, endive, escarole, and cilantro, with (~20%) vegetables such as squashes, green beans, snap peas, parsnips, carrots, and sweet potato. Fruits should be fed sparingly (mainly offered as treats, or to hydrate), and can include figs, berries, mango, papaya, melon, etc. This diet provides the proper calcium to phosphorus ratio (2:1) the iguanas require. Occasional treats can also be made of whole wheat bread, cooked pasta, and rice.