Mediterranean Spur-Thighed Tortoise

Testudo Graeca

The Greek tortoise is more commonly known as the Spur-thighed tortoise and is one of the Mediterranean species of tortoise. It is a hibernating species and requires warm days and cooler nights. It is a more commonly kept species of tortoise within the UK. Spur-thighed tortoises are within the medium sized family of tortoise breeds and are renowned for their extensive lifespan. High UV lighting is required and low humidity. On average, an adult Spur-thighed tortoise will grow to approximately 8-10 inches (20-25cms). However, this may vary in individuals.

This species is listed as a CITES Annex A species and **is required** to have the accompanying Article 10 CITES certificate to be legally sold. We will provide this certificate and it **must** stay with the tortoise throughout its life.

On average tortoises will live 30-50 years or more so it's a big decision for any family to purchase a tortoise as their new addition to the household. As a responsible pet owner, it is essential that you know all the requirements for looking after a tortoise before purchase.

We provide as much help and advice as you need before purchasing your tortoise and are here to answer any questions you may have afterwards too.

Forums and groups can be helpful and have some great information and ideas, but they can also be a very negative place too so just be aware, don't believe everything you read!

If you have any queries or questions and are intending or have already purchased a tortoise and/or product from us at The Tortoise Den, then we advise that you get in touch with us in the first instance for help and advice.

It is essential that you seek advice from us after purchase as you may risk infringing your guarantee if advice is taken elsewhere.

We recommend that you take out pet insurance and there is a voucher included with your purchase. To activate the insurance, you may telephone or visit the Exotic Direct website and click 'Activate Voucher' following onscreen prompts, within 14 days of your date of purchase.

Diet and Supplements

Tortoises are herbivores and require a good variety of food items that are high in fibre but low in fat and protein. As a guide, feed your tortoise with an amount of food roughly the same size as its shell for each daily feed, alternatively you can feed two smaller meals each day as tortoises are grazers. Do not overfeed your tortoise or offer dog and cat foods, or any other types of meat or animal protein as it will grow far too quickly for its shell which could be fatal. Slow and healthy growth is better!

Tortoises are a grazing reptile so planting an outdoor enclosure with feed safe weeds is ideal for foraging which is a natural source of enrichment. If your tortoise has access to this type of enclosure there is no need to offer additional feeding. You can also grow weeds inside on a windowsill and snip off food as required whilst ensuring that it is free from animal droppings and chemicals such as insecticides and exhaust fumes. It is essential to feed your tortoise a wide variety of food items.

A Tortoise diet should consist mainly of Greens, Grasses, Flowers and Weeds

Dandelion leaves, stalks and flowers, Common Marigold, Lawn grass, Clovers, Aloe, Pea shoots, Abutilon, Pak Choi, Cavelo Nero, Alfalfa, Mustard greens, Hollyhock, Forget-Me-Not, Lipstick Plant, Mulberry leaves, Watercress, Chicory, Common Sorrel, Chickweed, Wheat Germ, Opuntia Cactus (ficus indica), Fine Forage Grass, Chlorophytum (Spider Plant), Echinacea, Dahlia, English Daisy, Petunia, Coriander, Scotch Thistle, Shepherd’s Purse, Air Plant, Knapweed, Coneflower, Coreopsis, Hawkbit, Oregano, Pampas Grass, Lamb’s lettuce, Hibiscus, Marjoram, Cos lettuce,

Mint, Nasturtiums, Rose petals, Spring Greens, Callisia Repens, Bramble leaves, Selfheal, Crossandra, Lemon Balm, Meadow fescue, Red fescue, Aeonium, Sheep's fescue, Comb grass, Holcus, Bromeliad, Fountain grass, Reed Canary grass, Creeping thistle, Mazus, Great Burnet, Campanula, Globe Thistle, Fresh hay, Alexanders, Curly kale, Sea Holly, Rocket, Annual Ryegrass, Coleus, Meadow Sage, Perennial Ryegrass, Bristly Oxtongue, Smooth hawk's beard, Nipplewort, Teasel, Smooth Sow thistle, Blue Sow thistle, Great plantain, Millet, Bergamot, Chia, Friendship Plant, Hoary plantain, Ribwort plantain, African Violet, Cuphea, Boston Fern, Timothy Hay, Globe Artichoke, Mind-Your-Own-Business, Haworthia, Lady's Bedstraw, Common mallow, Musk mallow, Antirrhinum, Wild carrot, Elm, Echeveria, Kentucky bluegrass, London Pride, Maize, Dwarf mallow, Hairy bitter cress, Wavy bitter cress, Broadleaf Stonecrop, White/Dutch clover, Astilbe, Deadnettle, Caraway, Red clover, Common vetch, Sainfoin, Creeping bellflower, Field bindweed, Hedge mustard, Pansies, Violas, Lilac, Broadleaf Filaree, Cats ear, Lavateria, Sedums, Honeysuckle, Zinnia, Yellow Archangel.

Occasional Vegetables – Cucumber**,** Carrot, Broccoli, Cauliflower (and leaves), Parsnip, Fennel, Squash, Pumpkin.

Fruit is the equivalent of junk food for a tortoise so should be given very occasionally and make up no more than 5% of their diet (Strawberry, apple, pear, tomato, melon, plum, apricot). Ideally fruit should be avoided all together!

Calcium is an essential part of the tortoise's diet and is vital for even shell growth, to help prevent metabolic bone disease and for general good health and wellbeing. A calcium supplement can be used on food, such as Limestone flour or Pro Rep's 'Calci Dust' which is a phosphorus free calcium powder that can be sprinkled over the food at each feed. A combination of calcium and UVB aid your tortoise in essential vitamin D3 synthesis.

Cuttlefish bone, Calcium blocks, and 'Tortoise Block' by Zoo Med are examples of a good source of calcium and can be left within the enclosure for your tortoise to nibble on at their leisure. This natural behaviour also ensures that your tortoises' beak does not become overgrown. A good quality vitamin/mineral powder such as Vetark's 'Nutrobal' or HabiStat's 'Reptavite' should be sprinkled on food at each feed.

Poisonous foods to avoid feeding your tortoise –

Avocado, Hellebores, Narcissus, Azalea, Crocus, Mistletoe, Lupins, Rhubarb, Hemlock, Peony, Holly, Aubergine, Chilli peppers, Potato, Vinca, Calla Lily, Bleeding Heart, Hypericum, Tiger Lily, Foxglove, Hydrangea, Buttercup, Yew, Lobelia Aconite, Horse Chestnut, Daffodils, Ragwort, Rhododendron, Rosemary, Elderflower, Ivy, Hyacinth, Venus Flytrap, Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, Bean sprouts, Citrus fruits, Iris, Morning glory.

Before your tortoise starts to explore outside, please check that there is no poisonous vegetation within reach. Your tortoise may occasionally eat insects, worms and snails when exploring outside, this is natural behaviour. If your tortoise spends time outside, we advise that you use a good quality tortoise wormer regularly (approximately every 3 - 4 months) such as Cloverleaf Tortoise Wormer +.

All tortoise's carry their own complement of parasitic worms regardless of how healthy they are, worms are a fact of life for tortoises! When they are in good health, these worms do not cause any issue to your tortoise but as soon as the tortoise is stressed, ill or hibernating, its natural immunity is compromised, and internal parasites can take hold.

Bathing

Although tortoises will drink little water when fed a mixed moist diet, there should always be fresh drinking water available daily. Tortoises require a shallow warm bath approximately 3-4 times a week and daily throughout the warmer months. On purchasing a tortoise, we recommend that you bath them every day for the first week or two to discourage any stress and encourage active behaviour within the new environment.

The benefits of this are to help aid digestion, waste management and to ensure they are fully hydrated. Use a plastic tub or tray with enough luke-warm water to allow your tortoise to place its head under the water but not too deep that it cannot lift its head above the water. A soft toothbrush or cotton wool ball can be used to gently clean the shell. Tortoises will drink by submerging both their mouth and nose, even up to their necks. Ensure you check the temperature of the water before placing your tortoise in the bathing tub.

Allow approximately 10-15 minutes soak in the bath, this should be enough time to ensure your tortoise is fully hydrated and that the water doesn’t get cold. Your tortoise may empty its bowels in the bath or water bowl which is normal as they also absorb water through the vent in their tails. Drinking water should be refreshed as soon as possible and the bathing water changed.

Heating and Lighting

It is essential that your tortoise has a full spectrum light that produces UVB and UVA. UVB allows the tortoise to synthesise vitamin D3 helping to prevent or reverse metabolic bone disease and ensure normal shell growth, promoting long health. UVA increases feeding, mating and other natural behaviours. These are all fundamental to the normal development and health of basking reptiles such as tortoises.

You can use an ultraviolet strip light and a separate basking bulb or a combined mercury vapour basking lamp which provides both heat and UVA/UVB. Both the heat and UV (or single combination bulb) should be switched on for approximately 10-12 hours each day, this can be plugged into a timer and set appropriately. When your tortoise spends time outside during spring and summer, the sun provides the natural ultraviolet light required.

Ensure that one end of the tortoise housing is heated to around 27-34°c and the other end is cooler at around 17-22°c allowing your tortoise to choose its preferred temperature. Basking lamps should be kept at least 6 inches above the basking area, we recommend around 10 inches. The night-time temperature may drop to around 14°c-17°c, this is fine as it would naturally do this in an outdoor environment. If the temperature drops below this, for example over the winter months, we recommend using a ceramic heat emitting bulb.

Please always follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines on the installation and lifetime guarantee of any lighting unit/bulb you are using. We recommend using a trusted, qualified electrician/tradesman where required. As a guide, we would suggest replacing UVB strip lights every 6 months and mercury vapour combination bulbs every 12 months.

Housing, Furnishings and Substrates

If you are housing your tortoise inside, we recommend that you use an open top type of enclosure like a tortoise table and not a closed in vivarium as this is harder to regulate the heated and cooler ends of the housing. Humidity should be kept low to moderate as a higher humidity level can cause respiratory issues. A hide or plant pot with sphagnum moss inside is ideal to provide local humidity.

We recommend using a coco coir substrate and use this ourselves. We use a mixture of fine and coarse coco coir and spray it down with warm water daily. Alternatively, you can use a sterilised topsoil and play sand mix but ensure this doesn't become too dry in the heated enclosure and central heated house as this can cause issues with your tortoise' eyes and respiratory infections, especially on smaller hatchlings. To encourage natural behaviour and provide enrichment you can have several areas of varying substrates for your tortoise to discover.

Shelters can be provided within indoor or outdoor enclosures such as a tunnel, shelter, flowerpot, or moss hide. This will give a natural hiding place for your tortoise to behave as they would in the wild and escape the heat or hide from predators.

Outdoor enclosures should be available to your tortoise whenever the weather is suitably warm, the larger the space the better. This enclosure should be secure and escape proof, allow access to the sun and allow for sufficient air flow. All outdoor enclosures must be safe from predators such as foxes and large birds, so a mesh lid is essential for their protection.

A variety of plants can be grown within the enclosure to encourage natural foraging, secured rocks or slate for a shelter and a soil and sand area for digging. Water should always be accessible within the outdoor enclosure.

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