

## **Blue-tongued Skinks**

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Blue-tongued skinks originate from Australia and New Guinea. The most commonly kept skink is the Common / Eastern blue-tongued (*Tiliqua scincoides*), These are ground dwelling lizards, easily distinguished by their broad flat heads, lack of pronounced neck, smooth shiny scales, and small legs. Similar to some other lizards, they can shed their tail as a defence mechanism (autotomy), so care should be taken when handling. They are diurnal lizards, inhabiting a variety of habitats including open forests, heathlands and grasslands.

Another popular blue-tongued skink, is the Shingleback (*Tiliqua rugosa*), which can be distinguished by its huge armoured scales and short stumpy tail, which at first glance appears to resemble another head, so confusing predators.

Although, the different species may have different distinctive appearances, all of these lizards share similar care requirements as described below.

### **Scientific Classification**

Blue-tongued skinks belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Scincidae, Genus Tiliqua.

### **General care**

A wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for skinks, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. The minimum recommended size for an adult skink would be 1.2 meters (4ft) in length by 45cm (18 inches) deep by 45cm (18 inches) high, but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep.

Skinks are probably best kept alone as they naturally live in solitude in the wild, and will often fight if kept together in captivity.

Inside the vivarium, several hiding places should be provided which may be half a log, a purpose built cave or even just an empty box with a hole cut in the side. One shelter should also be kept moist and humid to provide a suitable environment where a skink can shed.

### **Hygiene**

A vivarium should be "spot-cleaned" daily to remove any droppings, dead insects or uneaten greens. Once a week, the whole vivarium can be cleaned with a disinfectant suitable for reptiles (further details of suitable disinfectants can be obtained from your vet). It is important to always wash your hands thoroughly after handling reptiles as they can carry Salmonella.

### **Substrate**

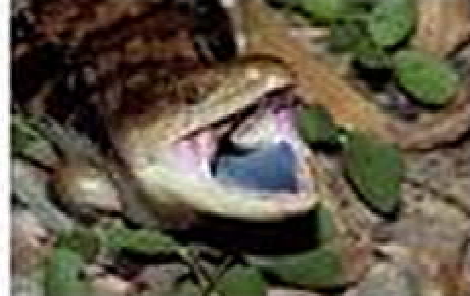
It is important to use a substrate that is easy to keep clean and replace, and is not going to cause a problem if accidentally eaten. Newspaper therefore makes the ideal substrate, but another alternative would be certain types of sand (but beware some types can cause impaction) or large stones which can be easily cleaned and are too big to be eaten.

Wood chips or shavings should never be used as they commonly cause intestinal blockage in lizards.



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## Temperature

Reptiles are not capable of regulating their own temperature so it is very important to keep their environment at an appropriate temperature at all times. A temperature gradient should therefore be provided, giving your reptile a hot end where they can bask and a cooler end to which they can retreat.

There are several types of heat sources available for vivariums including ceramic heaters, tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Heat mats can be particularly useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium, whereas lightbulbs can be used to create a basking spot in the daytime, but should not be relied on as the only heat source.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always monitor it carefully with a thermometer and use some form of thermostat so that temperature can be accurately controlled. Heat sources should also be protected with a wire mesh guard or similar safety device if they are within a skink's reach.

The ideal temperature range at which to keep a skink would be **25-29°C (77-84°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **32-35°C (89-95°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **21°C (69°F)** at night.

## Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept low (20-30%) for skinks that are used to a drier environment.

## Lighting

Skinks need to have access to both UVA and UVB rays, which many supposedly "full spectrum" reptile bulbs do not supply, so it is important to check this before purchasing a bulb. UVB rays are very important to allow a reptile to produce Vitamin D, which is essential for the absorption and use of calcium. Without this lizards are at risk of developing Metabolic Bone Disease, which can often be fatal.

Various different types of UVB lights are available. It is important to check the percentage of UV supplied by the bulb. Lizards such as skinks require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 10-14 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

## Diet

Blue-tongued skinks are omnivores and in the wild will consume a wide variety of livefood including insects, snails, birds eggs, and vegetable matter. In captivity therefore a mixed diet should be fed, composed of 60% plant and 40% animal matter. Fruit should only ever be given as a treat.

Suggested insects and plants are listed on a separate diet sheet. Fresh water should be supplied once daily, and fresh food every other day. It is important that the appropriate sized insects are fed, as lizards are prone to having problems with constipation. A general guideline is that the insect should never be bigger than the distance between your reptile's eyes.

## Lifespan

Blue-tongued skinks generally live between about 8-15 years

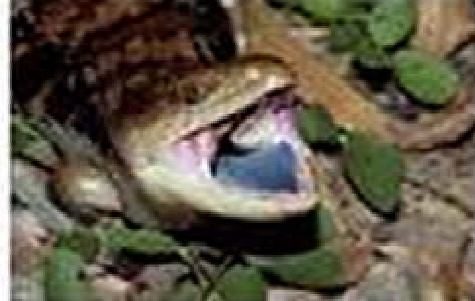


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### Signs of Health

A healthy skink will be bright and alert with clear open eyes and nostrils and a clean vent. Skin should be undamaged with no sign of parasites, and shedding should occur regularly. Your skink should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your skink's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage. It is advisable to take your skink to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.

### Signs of Illness

Reptiles will often not show obvious signs of illness until they are very sick, but you should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, skin colouration or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth or problems with shedding.

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a reptile vet as soon as possible.

**This caresheet is only intended as a general guideline, so please ask for further information.**

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