



Tegus

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The tegu (*Tupinambis spp*) are large ground-dwelling lizards originating from South America, where they occupy a similar ecological niche to the monitor lizards of Africa and Asia. The most commonly seen species in captivity are the Common Tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*), the Argentine Black and White Tegu (*Tupinambis merianae*), and the Red Tegu (*Tupinambis rufescens*),

Scientific Classification

Tegus belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Teiidae, Genus Tupinambis

General care

A strong wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for tegus, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. The minimum recommended size for an adult would be a 1.5 meters (5ft) long by 60cm (2ft) deep by 1.2 meters (4ft) high. but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep. These lizards can be kept alone or in groups, but owners should be aware that two males will often fight.

Inside the vivarium, a hiding place 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. A large water container is also required for bathing, although a pool for swimming is not essential.

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 an alternative more natural substrate may be preferred to allow burrowing behaviour

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 (infra red light bulbs), tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Incandescent spot lights will provide the ideal basking spot for your tegu, but should not be used as the sole heating source whereas heat mats are more useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always 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 an tegu's reach.

The ideal temperature range at which to keep a tegu would be **24-30°C (75-86°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **31-32°C (88-90°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **24°C (75°F)** at night.



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Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept moderate (50-60%) for tegus that are used to a sub-tropical environment. This humidity can be achieved by frequent misting of the vivarium with water.

Lighting

Tegus 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 tegus require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 10-14 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

Diet

Tegus are omnivores and in the wild will generally eat a variety of insects, small vertebrates and even some fruit. In captivity therefore, a varied diet should be supplied including insects such as locusts and crickets, as well as eggs, pre-killed rodents, fruit, leaves and some vegetable matter. It is important to provide food in a manner that will increase your tegu's exercise as obesity is a common problem in captivity.

Crickets and locusts are readily available at most pet shops. These crickets and mealworms are however, generally not high in nutrients directly from the pet shop and will need to be fed well (GrubGrub, baby cereal, fresh fruit & veggies) before being offered to your tegu. This is called 'gutloading'. Live food should be 'gutloaded' for 24 hours before feeding. In addition, feeds should be sprinkled with a powdered multivitamin/mineral supplement (further details can be obtained from your vet).

Tegus should be fed twice weekly, depending on weight gain and exercise. Fresh water should be supplied once daily.

Lifespan

Tegus generally live between 10-15 years.

Signs of Health

A healthy tegu 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 tegu should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your tegu'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 tegu 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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