

Basic care of Australian Freshwater Turtles.

The main species of turtles kept as pets in Australia are the long-necked turtles and the short-necked turtles. These are fascinating creatures and can make great pets provided their care needs are met. As turtles are a protected species in Australia, only acquire turtles from legal sources, eg. a pet shop.

Housing

You will need an aquarium to house your turtle, the basic rule is the bigger the better.

** The water depth should be at least twice the length of the shell (ie. a shell length of 15cm = water depth of 30cm)

** The substrate (eg gravel) should be large enough that the turtle can't accidentally swallow it, or for ease of cleaning the bottom may be left bare.

** The turtle will need an area out of the water for basking. This area should be large enough for the turtle to move around on and be easily accessible for the turtle (eg by use of a ramp).

Lighting

** Turtles need approximately 20-30 minutes of natural unfiltered (not through glass or plastic) sunlight 2 - 3 times a week, a shallow container with a little water is good for this - make sure they don't overheat. They use the UVB rays to produce Vitamin D3, which is essential for proper calcium metabolism.

** A UV light may be used, however, the UVB emissions from these lights fall after 3 - 6 months, so will need to be replaced frequently.

Heating

** An aquarium heater will be needed to keep the water between 20 & 28 degrees. You will also need an aquarium thermometer to keep a check on this.

** The basking area will also need to be heated to the appropriate temp for your species.

Water Quality

** If using tap water to fill the tank a water conditioner will need to be used.

** Keeping the water quality good is vitally important to the health of your turtle, and the cause of most illnesses in captive turtles can be traced back to poor water quality.

** The aquarium will need a biological filter system.

** Once a week a 25% water change is recommended.

** You will also need to test the pH of the water regularly. The aquarium water should have a pH of 7 - 8.4, which is neutral to slightly alkaline.

Feeding:

** Long-neck turtles are carnivorous and will eat insects (moths, crickets), tadpoles, small freshwater fish (such as white bait, guppies etc), fresh and saltwater prawns and yabbies, snails and mussels and worms. Any saltwater feed should be rinsed thoroughly and soaked for at least an hour.

** Short-neck turtles eat a more varied diet and as well as feeding for the long-neck turtle you can also offer them vegetables and fruits such as spinach, broccoli, cabbage, pumpkin, parsley, apples, pears and stone fruits. You can also give some freshwater plants such as duckweeds, ribbonweed and Nardoo.

** Turtles need to be submerged to feed.

** Turtles will readily overeat and are known to eat the 'wrong' foods if available. They will also pick their favourite out of a mixed feed and leave the rest if given the opportunity.

** how much to feed? the meal should be about the size of the turtles head.

** How often to feed: An adult should be fed about twice a week, every 2 days for juveniles - remove any uneaten food after a couple of hours. You can feed the turtle in a separate container with water if needed to keep the tank cleaner as turtles feed in the water.