

## Diet & Water

Your box turtle is an omnivore, consuming both plant and animal matter. Improper diet accounts for the majority of all box turtle health disorders and captive care problems.

Box turtles are more carnivorous than vegetarian and require a high intake of Vitamin A. There are a variety of scientifically developed diets available for box turtles, but these should be used as part of their overall diet. Variety is key and by offering an assortment of foods, your box turtle will do very well.

### Things to include in your box turtles diet:

- earthworms
- crickets
- mealworms
- feeder goldfish
- waxworms
- grasshoppers
- soaked trout chow
- dandelion
- spinach
- mustard and turnip greens

Occasionally, you can provide treats for your box turtle. If you feed the turtle these treats from your hand, it will associate you with the treat, creating a bond between you and your turtle. Used sparingly, box turtle treats include:

- raspberries
- strawberries
- papayas
- apples

Box turtles need water for drinking and lowering their body temperature. Change water daily.

## Cleaning & Care

Substrate must remain clean and dry. Wet substrate creates too high humid conditions. Wet and soiled substrate promotes fungi and bacterial growths. Water in soaking bowl should be changed three times a week or more often if dirty. Remove feces and uneaten food daily from housing unit. Disinfect food bowl daily. Under normal conditions housing unit is to be sanitized every four weeks.

Ants can kill turtles! Ants may accumulate and eat vegetable matter and meats. To combat ant problems, remove the box turtle and it's food and water, and either pour boiling water on the ant nests or spray the area with all-purpose cleaner. Wait ½ hour and wash the area with water. To prevent future ant problems, place the turtle food on a small plate. Place the small plate on a larger plate filled with water. Ants cannot cross the water for the food.

*This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available which provide in-depth information on box turtles and their care.*

**Do right by your pet.**

**Do right by our environment.**

**Don't release unwanted pets.**

Visit **Habitattitude™** on [www.pijac.org](http://www.pijac.org)



**Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council**  
[www.pijac.org](http://www.pijac.org)

# Caring for Your Turtle



**Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council**  
[www.pijac.org](http://www.pijac.org)

## About Box Turtles

Box turtles are beautiful, interesting, and intelligent. They live long lives, and most species do well in captivity if maintained properly.

Box turtles are reasonably priced, increasing their popularity, but this can send the unintentional message that they are an expendable pet. Today, the majority of box turtles are field collected. In the future, they may only be available through captive breeding. Please place a high value on your new turtle.

There are several species of box turtles available today but the three most common are the Eastern, Three Toed, and Ornate.

The Eastern and Three Toed species are found in a variety of habitats from forests, fields and roadsides to grasslands bordering marshes. The Ornate species is also found in open woodlands, but seems to prefer plains and prairies where it is somewhat more arid.

This pamphlet provides information on the optimal care guidelines for your new box turtle. Prior to purchasing your turtle, select the necessary housing and equipment, and then introduce the turtle to his new home. You will soon discover that their unique personality will provide years of enjoyment and education for you and your family.

## Selecting Your Box Turtle

Select a specimen that is active and alert with bright, clear eyes. Examine the turtle for any deformities, shell damage, or swelling of the neck or eyes. Pick him up and make sure he has some weight to him. A feisty, squirming little guy is the best choice.

## Housing & Environment

A 30-gallon aquarium, or 20" aquarium, would make an ideal home for your new box turtle. Additional options include a high-sided plastic tub or a polyurethane-sealed plywood box. Any enclosure should have a minimum of 12" high walls and the top should remain open.

The floor should be covered with a 3-4" layered substrate that allows for easy cleaning, adequate digging, and moisture retention. Many different materials are available, but a combination of wood bark chips, cypress mulch, organic potting soil, and dried leaves works well. The substrate should be spot cleaned and misted daily, turned and aerated weekly, and replaced as needed.

Inside the enclosure, your turtle will want places where he can hide. Consider including large cork-bark pieces, a box, and/or a potted fern or other non-toxic house plant. This will add to your turtles feeling of comfort and security.

It is also highly recommended to keep your box turtle in a protected outside pen as much as possible. There is no substitution for fresh air, natural sunlight and the ability to forage.

## Temperature

Replicating the box turtles natural environment is important. Box turtles are from temperate climates and require a changing ambient temperature range between 70 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Use an incandescent reptile fixture with a UVB bulb to provide an adequate temperature range. Position the UVB bulb to one side of the enclosure so the turtle has a choice of temperature ranges. A timer will assist in regulating the lighting and temperature to a 12- hour cycle, using the light during the day for warmth. The ideal temperature for the enclosure is 85 degrees directly under the light, and 77-80 degrees on the farthest side of the enclosure. If the room temperature will not allow the enclosure to maintain 70 degrees during the evening then an under aquarium heat pad will be necessary.

## Humidity

Relative humidity is one of the most important factors in proper box turtle husbandry. It is important that the substrate be misted daily, without soaking it through. Spray it thoroughly as you turn and mix it, and remove all droppings and uneaten food. The relative humidity should be kept between 60 to 75 percent, with slightly higher "micro climates" under cork bark flats or hide boxes.