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## Tegu Care

### INTRODUCTION

Tegus are native to Central and South America. Lifespan and adult sizes vary with species, and many can get quite large.

### HOUSING

Tegus should generally be housed singly throughout their lives.

**Cage** – A 30-40 gallon aquarium is adequate for a single juvenile animal. An adult tegu requires a minimum enclosure size of at least twice the length of the animal. Use a secure mesh top to prevent escape and allow proper ventilation. Due to the large size of adult tegus, you may have to build an appropriate enclosure or invest in a large commercial enclosure.

**Bedding/Substrate** – Newspapers or paper towels are safest and easiest to replace/clean. Vinyl tile (from hardware store) or Repti-Carpet can also be used. If a paper pulp material (Carefresh) is used, you should feed your pet in a separate enclosure to prevent ingestion. Replace the bedding/substrate or clean the hard surface every 1-2 days to prevent exposure to waste. \*\*Sand, gravel, mulch/brick, or other natural substrates are not recommended due to difficulties in cleaning, risk of gastrointestinal issues if eaten, and problems with irritation or eyes and the delicate tissue of the mouth.

**Cage furniture** – Branches, driftwood, cork bark and/or large rocks can be provided for climbing. Hiding areas should also be provided. \*\*Heated rocks should NEVER be used due to risk of thermal burns.

**Temperature/heating** – A temperature gradient should be created within the enclosure, with a warm side and a cool side. This allows the tegu to regulate its temperature by changing location. Provide a daytime focal basking area of 95-100°F (use incandescent bulb, ceramic heating element, or red/other bulb; under tank heating pad can also be used if needed) on the warm side of the enclosure. Daytime temperatures on the cooler side of the enclosure should be 75-85°F. Use multiple digital thermometers with probes to ensure appropriate temperatures are maintained. Dial thermometers are often inaccurate. Provide a nighttime temperature range of 75-85°F throughout the enclosure. If needed, a safe under tank heating pad, ceramic heating element, or red bulb can help in maintaining recommended temperatures. Due to risk of burn injuries, always use appropriate rheostats/thermostats if using the commonly available ZooMed heating pads. Heating pads with which we have had good experiences include Ultratherm Heat Pads ([beanfarm.com](http://beanfarm.com)) and Cobra T-Rex Heat Pads (available from many pet stores)

**Lighting** – Provide an ultraviolet B (5.0 UVB) light over the basking area (within 18 inches; no glass/acrylic in between) for approximately 12 hours a day. UVB is necessary for vitamin D production and appropriate absorption of calcium from the gastrointestinal system. Replace this bulb approximately every 6 months, as UVB production decreases with time.

### DIET

In the wild, adult tegus are omnivores consuming animal protein, insects, and fruits. Vegetables can always be offered but tegus typically prefer to avoid greens and some even have trouble digesting them. Variety and

balance are key to keeping a healthy tegu. Hatchlings and juveniles are primarily insectivores in the wild but in captivity can be taught to eat other foods as well.

Hatchlings should be fed every day with a strong focus on gut loaded insects. Crickets, dubia roaches, and earthworms should make up the bulk of the diet. Pinkie mice can be offered once a week but it is recommended to wait until the hatchling tegus are a bit larger and older. Small amounts of boiled or cooked eggs and small amounts of fish can be offered as well to round out the meal and offer variety. Fruits can be offered along with the insects or pinkies and are encouraged for enrichment.

Tegus under 3 years old should still be fed every other day until they reach sexual maturity and roughly adult size. Whole prey such as mice “hoppers” and “fuzzies” make excellent feeders for smaller tegus whereas the larger ones can be fed various adult mice sizes. Cooked or boiled eggs, fish pieces, earthworms, roaches, or crickets, and other insects should be added to the diet. Again, fresh fruits should be offered.

Adults should be fed every 2-3 days depending on their body condition (obese tegus will eat less often than under weight tegus). The bulk of an adult tegu’s diet should consist of rodents, small rats, and the occasional baby chick. Insects, eggs, and fish should all be offered as well. Pieces of cooked chicken can be offered as a treat for enrichment as well as training in some individuals. Fresh fruits should be offered in moderation to prevent excessive weight gain from high sugar concentrations.

To prevent injury to your pet, never feed live rodents and remove uneaten crickets immediately.

### **WATER**

**Water bowl** – Provide clean, fresh water in a dish/bowl into which your dragon can easily climb (small/low for juveniles). It should be large enough to fit your pet’s entire body (a baking pan or low sided cat litter box work well). Change water daily

**Humidity** – Fill a dish or container large enough to fit your pet’s entire body (a baking pan or low sided cat litter box work well) with sphagnum moss, and mist this area once or twice daily with water from a spray bottle to keep it moist, creating a higher humidity micro-environment for your pet. Watch the moss closely for mold growth and waste, and replace it completely approximately every 2 weeks, or more often if needed

**Soaking** – Soak your pet 2-3 times a week in warm, shallow water for 15-20 minutes to encourage drinking, improve hydration, and help with shedding

### **HEALTH CARE**

We recommend a complete physical exam, choanal culture, and fecal examination by an exotic animal veterinarian for all newly acquired pet Tegus. Thereafter, we recommend exams every 6 months and yearly choanal cultures and fecal exams.

### **COMMON MEDICAL PROBLEMS**

**Obesity** – Tegus that continue to be fed too frequently into adulthood can easily become overweight. It is important to have your Tegu brought into the veterinarian yearly for an annual exam, where your veterinarian can assess your tegu’s body condition. Overweight tegus are often put on more appropriate feeding schedules and the sugary fruits and fattier food items are lessened in the diet to assist with weight loss.

**Metabolic Bone Disease** – Inappropriate lighting and inappropriate calcium supplementation can lead to brittle or soft bones that can easily break. Signs include weakness, decreased appetite, swelling of the joints/legs, and twitching or tremors. If you notice any of these signs, please contact your veterinarian.

**Impaction** – Tegus defecate fairly regularly. If they go for several days without defecating, they could potentially have a blockage in their intestinal tract. Please contact your veterinarian if your Tegu has not defecated for several days.

**Abscess** – Abscesses appear as firm lumps on your Tegu. They will need to be lanced and some need to be surgically removed.