

DESERT TORTOISE

(Gopherus agassizi)

HABITAT: All turtles and tortoises should be kept outside. This area should be secure from escape and predators including dogs. The area should be at least 15x20 feet. If it has a gate it should be locked or tortoise proofed. This can be accomplished by screwing boards at least 12 inches high across the bottom of the opening so it is necessary to step over to go through. Never leave them loose while you just run in for the phone or to get a drink as they will be gone when you return. A heated night house is essential in the coastal areas.

FOOD: Their main diet should be 90% grass and weeds. The rest can be rose petals (do not use any chemicals), hibiscus leaves and flowers, grape leaves, mulberry leaves and prickly pear cactus. Water can be offered once a month. Do not leave a dish of water in the habitat.

ILLNESS: They are especially susceptible to respiratory ailments. Runny, bubbly noses or gasping can be symptoms of respiratory infections or parasites. More tortoises die from respiratory infections than from any other cause. A veterinarian experienced in treating turtles and tortoises should be consulted immediately to begin proper treatment. For swollen eyes, wounds and other injuries contact a vet.

HIBERNATION: If your tortoise is sick do not attempt to hibernate it. In the late fall as the days begin to get shorter and cooler your tortoise will start to eat less, bask less and appear sluggish, this is a sign that it is ready to hibernate. When ready to hibernate the heater in the night house should be turned off. At this time it needs to be placed in a cool (40-50 degrees) dry box in a protected area for hibernation, such as a garage or storage building. If it has an insulated night house it can be left there. Be sure it is protected from rodents.

You should check your tortoise at least once a month be sure it is ok. A sleeping tortoise will usually respond to a touch of its foot. If not you need to pick it up and check further. If the nose is runny or bubbly put it in a warm area and consult with your vet. When the days begin to warm in the early spring the tortoise will become active in its box or house. At this time it should be placed in its habitat and water can be offered. Within a week or two it should begin normal activities of eating and basking.

AGE: It is impossible to determine the age of a turtle or tortoise unless you know when they hatched. You can not count the rings. In captivity they will grow much faster than in the wild.

SEX: All hatchings are flat on the bottom (plastron) of the shell. At about 10 to 15 years the plastron of a male will begin to become concave (dip in) and the female will remain flat.

REGISTRATION: All California Desert tortoises must be registered with Fish and Game. There is no charge but a large fine if not registered. Forms can be obtained from us.

GENERAL INFORMATION: You should never drill a hole in the edge of the shell for the purpose of restraining your tortoise. This can cause an infection. Nothing such as paint should be put on the shell.

If for any reason you can no longer care for your tortoise remember as per our agreement it is to be returned for readoption.

If a friend or neighbor wants your tortoise have them contact us for adoption.

Turtle & Tortoise Rescue of Arroyo Grande, Inc.

A 501(c)3 Non-profit rescue
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