

SWALLOW AQUATICS CARESHEET
MEDITERANEAN TORTOISES

Spur Thighed Tortoise, Testudo Graeca T. Ibera.

Hermans Tortoise, Testudo Hermani.

Marginated Tortoise, Testudo Marginata

Housing

All of the species can be kept outdoors throughout most of the summer months provided they have access to a dry hide, and are protected from predators with a mesh top.

OUTDOOR PEN

The outdoor pen must be as large as possible. Tortoises need lots of space to move around and thermoregulate properly. Remember they are cold-blooded creatures and cannot regulate their own temperature. The pen must be in full sunlight with added shade all day.

In colder weather a heat lamp can be placed inside the shelter. A 60-100w spot lamp will usually suffice. The temperature under the lamp should be between 88-100°f and make sure the animal can retreat from this at any time.

An indoor enclosure will be required for hatchlings, or poorly adults during cooler periods of weather.

A set up as follows will be required.

(picture here)

In vivariums tortoises should always be heated from above using a heater type lamp and a UVC 5.0 lamp. Both lamps should be run 8-14 hours per day. Water should be available to the animals at all times.

If tortoises are brought indoors away from direct sunshine they must always be given back up heat in the form of lamps, never just place them in a warm room and hope for the best. They need to regulate a daytime temperature of 88°F. This will never happen without radiant heat.

Feeding

All Mediterranean tortoises are herbivores and never must be fed any meat products, high protein and fat diets are lethal to these animals.

The best diets are comprised mainly of edible weeds and grasses, with the occasional addition of chopped fresh vegetables and small amounts of fruit.

Dandelions, clover, sow thistle, plantains, fruit tree leaves, cabbage, spring greens, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, cucumber, apple and melon. All of the above can be cleaned, chopped and mixed with a good quality calcium vitamin supplement. (Vetark Nutrobal is ideal) and fed daily.

Calcium is highly important to tortoises as not only must they grow healthy bones, but also a shell and adult females will need large amounts to produce eggs.

Juvenile tortoises must not be over fed, one feed per day is all they need. Tortoises should grow slowly to grow properly.

Fibre is also very important to tortoises, it not only aids digestion but also stops heavy infestations of parasitic worms and protozoans.

The best ways to provide fibre would be to add small amounts of chopped grass/hay to the food provided, and allow natural grazing on a weedy lawn.

Hibernation

Before considering hibernation, make sure you identify the species or subspecies of animal you have. Many of the spur thigh tortoises, Testudo Graeca, from northern Africa do not hibernate or only hibernate for short periods of time.

Generally though Mediterranean tortoises hibernate, it is commonly believed that small/hatchling tortoises should not be hibernated, this is not true. In nature if the adult animals must hibernate then so must their offspring.

It has been proven that hibernation helps steady growth, reducing lumpy shell development it increases appetite and prevents certain types of anorexia, especially in animals that live outdoors.

Do not hibernate tortoises for too long. Make sure they are protected from freezing, tortoises should be kept at a constant 4-5°C during hibernation.

Make sure the animal is allowed two to three weeks without food to clear the gut of food prior to hibernation, during this time provide good access to drinking water.

After hibernation always provide the tortoise with a heat lamp bringing its temperature up to 88°F with good access to food and water. Healthy animals should start feeding between one and two days from waking up.

INDOOR HIBERNACULUM

(picture here)

This can be placed in an outhouse or cold room at 4-5°C, protect from frost and rats or mice.

OUTDOOR HIBERNACULAM

In the outdoor hibernaculum the tortoise can control its body temperature by burying deeper in cold weather or shallower in warm weather.

Additional Information

It is important to find a knowledgeable veterinarian, although with proper care and attention tortoises should rarely become sick. Reptile diseases can overcome their hosts very quickly and therefore speed in diagnosis and treatment is essential. Many vets will try and treat tortoises without actually knowing a great deal about them. Good quality books on the subject are very useful for reference. Some good books available include;

Andy C Highfield	Encyclopedia of Tortoises and Terrapins. (Carapace press)
Brian Pursalls	Keeping Mediterranean Tortoises. (T.F.H)

Joining tortoise groups and clubs is also a good idea.

Two very good ones on the UK are;

The tortoise Trust	The British Chelonia Society
BM Tortoise	PO Box 2163
London	London
WC1N 3XX	NW10 5HW

Also help and advice on any of the above can always be obtained from Swallow Aquatics between 9am and 6pm seven days a week.
Telephone 01953 718184

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