

Russian tortoise care sheet



This small tortoise enjoys burrowing and roaming about its habitat. They can become tame and friendly with gentle handling. With a long life span, expect your Russian tortoise to be a companion for life.

facts

scientific name:	testudo horsfieldi
average adult size:	6 to 8 inches long
average life span:	up to 50+ years with proper care,
diet:	herbivore



***Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources on the back of this Care Sheet or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.*

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

diet

A well-balanced Russian tortoise diet consists of:

- High fiber and calcium, low protein and fat is needed to ensure good digestive tract function.
- Dark green leafy vegetables, squash, carrots, etc.; fruit should be given sparingly as a treat.
- Also benefit from a Russian tortoise commercial diet, but should be no more than 25% of the diet.

feeding

Things to remember when feeding your Russian tortoise:

- Fresh, clean, chlorine-free water should be available at all times. Some tortoises have a tendency to go to the bathroom in their water bowl, so expect to clean and disinfect this daily.
- Feed tortoises daily; finely chop vegetables.
- Sprinkle food with calcium supplement daily and a multi-vitamin supplement once or twice a week.
- Discard vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours.

housing

- Size - Indoor enclosure should be at least 36"x12"; outdoor enclosure should be at least 48"x48" with a secure screened cover to allow sunshine but provide protection; the walls should be high enough that the tortoise can't escape and buried at least 12" into the ground, as Russian tortoises will dig.
- Habitat - Keep habitat arid and dry, with shaded areas to escape direct sunlight. Humid climates may need a dehumidifier, and cool climates require supplemental heating. Provide a hiding area, such as a cave or hide box filled with additional substrate. Maintain less than 60% humidity.
- Substrate - Tortoises are known for eating substrate, so use something that is digestible such as alfalfa pellets; substrate should be deep enough for the tortoise to burrow. Don't use coarse substrates such as sand or gravel that can scratch the shell.

red flags

- Eye, nose or mouth discharge
- Soft, discolored or rough spots on shell
- Lethargic
- Bumps or spots on skin
- Abnormal feces
- Sneezing, mouth breathing or runny nose
- Overgrown beak

If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.



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- Temperature - Temperature gradient (85°F for the warm end and 75°F for the cool end); recommend using an incandescent light or ceramic heater as primary heat source.
- Lighting - Providing UVB lighting for 12 to 14 hours a day is required.
- Water - Provide constant access to a shallow container large enough for the tortoise to soak in and drink from; the tortoise should be able to easily enter and exit the water bowl.
- Russian tortoises can be kept together, but do **not** house different tortoise species together.

normal behavior

- Active, friendly and outgoing.
- Will become tame with gentle handling and time; move slowly around tortoises to avoid startling them.
- Adept at digging to

escape; hide in objects and burrow into substrate.

habitat maintenance

Thoroughly clean and disinfect the habitat at least once a week: place tortoise in a secure habitat; scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3% bleach solution; rinse thoroughly with water, removing all traces of bleach smell; dry the tank and furnishings completely and add clean substrate.

grooming & hygiene

Weekly water soaks with water level no deeper than the mid-point between the bottom of the tortoise's shell and its top.

signs of a healthy animal

- Active and alert
- Eats regularly
- Healthy shell
- Clear, bright eyes
- Healthy skin
- Clear nose and vent

common health issues		
Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Metabolic bone/vitamin deficiency	Inability to absorb calcium due to insufficient UVB light or diet (including supplementation). If untreated, can lead to a disorder characterized by deformities, softened bones, swollen limbs and lethargy.	Consult your veterinarian and provide ample UVB lighting and proper diet with calcium supplementation.
Respiratory disease	Labored breathing or runny nose. Can be caused by cold, damp habitat or infectious disease.	Consult with your veterinarian and ensure the habitat is the proper temperature.
Ticks and mites	Parasites on the skin; can transmit disease.	Consult with your veterinarian.
Gastrointestinal disease	Runny stools, caked or smeared stool around the vent area and loss of appetite caused by bacterial or parasitic infection.	Consult with your veterinarian.

shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- Commercial Russian tortoise food
- Substrate
- Food dish and water ramp bowl
- Hideaway place
- Plants
- UVB lighting and fixture
- Heat light and fixture
- Vitamin supplement
- Calcium supplement
- Thermometer
- Humidity gauge
- Book about Russian tortoises

sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on Russian tortoises and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all reptiles are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your reptile or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for reptiles and should consider not having a reptile as a pet.

Go to cdc.gov/healthypets and petco.com/caresheet for more information about reptiles and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to petco.com for more information.



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