

The following is some *very* basic information on how to care for a green iguana. We urge you to read through this information and continue to learn even more by visiting the web sites and reading the books listed on the back of this pamphlet.

Food & Feeding

Iguanas are herbivores, which means they should only eat plant matter. Iguanas require fairly high amounts of calcium in their diet to prevent a nutritional deficiency commonly called Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD). Calcium-poor/phosphorus-rich diets are a common problem for iguanas in captivity. To provide enough calcium, owners should feed their iguanas diets that contain a calcium/phosphorus ratio of 2:1. Since most vegetables are high in phosphorus and low in calcium, it is important that owners provide calcium-rich greens as a major dietary component, and occasional use of calcium supplements is recommended. A well-balanced iguana diet should consist of a wide variety of fresh greens (ex. collard, mustard, turnip) and vegetables such as green beans, orange-fleshed squashes, okra, peas, parsnip, and others. Iguanas should also be fed small amounts of fresh fruits. Many vegetables and fruits should be avoided or only fed occasionally due to substances they contain which may be harmful in large amounts or which may lead to nutritional imbalances. Such vegetables include spinach, kale, cabbages and their relatives, broccoli, potatoes, corn, most lettuces (which contain very few nutrients), and many others. Iguanas should *never* be regularly fed dog or cat food, monkey chow, mice, insects, milk products and other foods that contain animal products and/or high amounts of protein. Too much protein in the diet leads to gout and kidney failure at young ages. In addition, we do not recommend that commercial iguana foods be used as a diet staple because they frequently lack nutrients or contain harmful ingredients. Fresh drinking water should also be provided at all times. As you can tell, feeding an iguana is one of the most challenging and time consuming parts of caring for it. Learn as much as you can!

Habitats, Enclosures & Cages

If an iguana is to be kept in an enclosure or cage, it needs to be *very* large. Iguanas can reach six feet in length and can weigh up to 15-20 pounds. The enclosure needs to be large enough to give the iguana room to move around and become comfortable. 8' L x 4' W x 6' H is suitable for a full grown iguana. A heat source such as a basking light, a ceramic heating element, human heating pads wrapped in a towel, or other suitable heating device must be used. Hot rocks and heated branches should not be used for iguanas and can lead to serious burns and even fire. Daytime temperatures should be no cooler than 80°, 85° F on the warm side, with a 90-95° F basking area. Several thermometers should be placed in different locations in the habitat. The habitat should also have proper lighting. Ultraviolet (UVB) light is essential, and we recommend ZooMed's Iguana Light 5.0 or Reptisun 5.0 fluorescent bulbs for regular maintenance. We also recommend Mega-Ray mercury vapor bulbs, especially for sick or gravid iguanas. Mercury vapor bulbs are very powerful and must be used according to directions. UVB lights should not be covered by glass or other material, because the UVB rays will be filtered out. These bulbs should be replaced every six months to a year. The lights in the habitat should be on for only 11-12 hours per day, so the iguana can have a day/night cycle of light and dark. Humidity should be high and can be increased by spraying the habitat with a spray bottle several times daily or by using a humidifier. Never use particulate substrate (bedding or flooring). Artificial turf, paper or terry cloth towels, unprinted newspaper, or vinyl flooring is recommended. Providing a suitable habitat for an iguana can be very expensive, and this should be considered if you're thinking about getting an iguana.

Health & Safety

Owners should take their iguanas to the vet for regular checkups, just as with other pets. New iguanas should be taken to a qualified herp vet to be examined for parasites and other problems. Many vets do not treat iguanas, so it's important to look around for a qualified herp vet. Regular checkups should be done at least once per year.

Sunlight

Ultraviolet light (UVB) is *very* important for iguanas to maintain healthy bones. A very common disease in iguanas is called Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD). MBD is caused by a combination of a lack of dietary calcium, basking temperatures that are too low (which prevents proper food digestion and nutrient absorption) and lack of UVB light exposure. Its symptoms include soft or brittle bones, a swollen or rubbery lower jaw, swelling or bowing of the legs, and weakness or paralysis in the limbs. MBD can be prevented and often cured with a calcium rich diet, access to unfiltered UVB light, and proper temperatures. The absolute best source of UVB light is direct sunlight. Providing an outdoor sunning cage and supervised time outside is highly recommended.

Cleaning and cleanliness

Regular cleaning is absolutely essential when owning an iguana! *Salmonella*, a type of bacteria that can be spread to humans, can be very harmful to you and your family if proper hygiene is not practiced regularly. Always wash your hands after handling an iguana and always clean up the habitat every day. If there are infants, pregnant women, or other people that are easily susceptible to illness in the home, you should use *extreme* caution when iguanas or other reptiles are present.

Taming

Unlike domesticated pets like dogs, iguanas are wild animals. They retain their wild instincts and urges throughout their life. Considerable time must be spent taming young iguanas. It's also common for adult iguanas, especially males, to become very aggressive - particularly during breeding season. A large iguana is capable of seriously injuring people by biting and tail whipping. When iguanas get older, owners should use extreme caution and be aware that their iguana, no matter how tame, can become very aggressive.

A few quick facts about green iguanas and proper iguana care

- Iguanas are herbivores, which means they are plant eaters.
- Iguanas are arboreal, which means they live in trees in the wild.
- Iguanas can grow up to six feet in length and can weigh up to 15-20 pounds.
- Iguanas that are kept in a cage or habitat will outgrow a small cage. Aquariums, even very large ones are *not* suitable for adult iguanas.
- Pet iguanas need regular access to unfiltered ultraviolet (UV) lighting, direct sunlight, warm temperatures, high humidity, and a high calcium, low phosphorus, well balanced diet to remain healthy.
- Hot rocks, heated caves, and heated branches should *not* be used with iguanas and can lead to serious burns and even fire.
- Iguanas should *not* be fed food that contains animal protein. Such foods include dog and cat food, insects, mice, dairy products, and many others.
- Most types of lettuce are nutritionally poor and should *not* be fed to an iguana on a regular basis.
- Most pre-packaged commercial iguana foods do not provide enough nutrition to keep an iguana healthy. Commercial iguana food should only be used as a supplement to a well balanced diet of a variety of fresh greens, vegetables, and fruit.
- Pet iguanas should be taken to a qualified herp vet at least once per year.

Where to learn more

These are only the basics about iguana care. Caring for an iguana properly can be very expensive and time consuming – more so than most people anticipate. If you're considering an iguana for a pet, make sure you can afford it, make sure you have the time to care for it, and most importantly, learn as much as possible about iguanas and iguana care *before* you get one. The Green Iguana Society's web site is full of information on how to care for iguanas, and we also link to many other web sites where you can learn more. Below is a list of a few web sites and two of the very few iguana care books we recommend.

Recommended Web Sites:

The Green Iguana Society -
<http://www.greenigsociety.org>

Melissa Kaplan's Herp and Iguana
Care Information Collection -
<http://www.anapsid.org/>

Jennifer Swofford's Iguana Pages -
<http://www.baskingspot.com/iguanas/index.html>

Wong's Green Iguana Heaven -
<http://mail.milagros.net/caiman>



Recommended Books
Green Iguana - The
Ultimate Owner's Manual
by James W. Hatfield
ISBN 1883463483

Iguanias for DUMMIES
by Melissa Kaplan
ISBN 0764552600

Questions?

E-mail us at: questions@greenigsociety.org

Green Iguana Society
www.greenigsociety.org

We are dedicated to providing quality information on iguana care as well as information on current iguana adoptions and rescues throughout the United States and Canada.

Green iguanas are one of the most popular reptile pets, but they are also very misunderstood. They have many special needs, such as specific food and habitat requirements, which should be considered before you get a green iguana for a pet. The Green Iguana Society was formed to help people learn more about how to properly care for their iguanas. The information we are providing here is *only* some very basic information on iguana care. If you're serious about properly caring for an iguana, please visit our web site. We provide detailed advice on feeding, providing a proper habitat, health and safety issues, quick help and answers to common questions, an interactive message board, adoption and rescue information, a Kids Club aimed at helping kids learn more about iguana care, suggestions about where you can find more information about various topics, and much more.