

Green Iguana Care Sheet

Basic Information and Care Requirements

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GEORGIA REPTILE AND
AMPHIBIAN RESCUE EFFORT

Introduction:

The green iguana is one of the most common pet lizards. They have very distinct personalities and can be quite enjoyable to have in your home, but they are not for everybody. Their size and potential temperaments lend us to urge caution to anyone who is thinking about an iguana as a pet. Look carefully into their care and socialization needs before you get one. We also do not recommend iguanas as pets for small children.

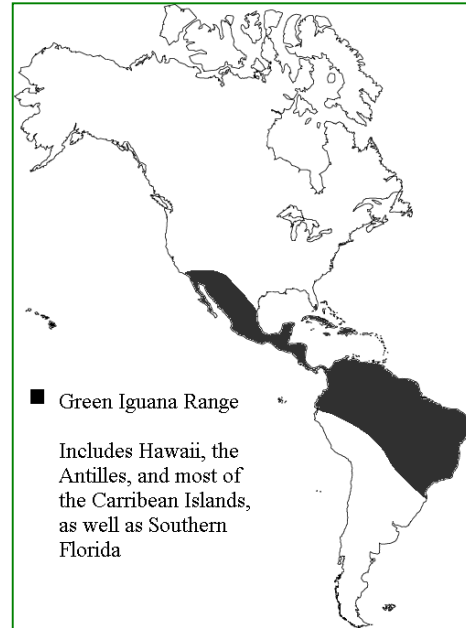
Basic Information:

Scientific Name – *Iguana iguana*

Natural Habitat – mixed Terrestrial/Arboreal, Forests, fond of trees overhanging water.

Size – average maximum length is ~5 to 6 feet

Lifespan – expect up to 15 to 20 years for a healthy iguana in captivity



Diet – Strictly Herbivorous – NO ANIMAL

PROTEIN SHOULD BE FED! Stick with plant proteins such as soy. NEVER USE CAT OR DOG FOOD!!! Iguanas are highly adaptable, and will eat just about anything if they can reach it, but this can have tragic results.

Salad of dark greens such as collards, turnip greens, dandelion, hibiscus leaves, escarole, carrot tops. (Spinach, chard, cabbage, bok-choy, kale, and beet greens can be fed sparingly. They contain chemicals which can inhibit calcium uptake, leading to calcium deficiencies.)

Grated or chopped vegetables should include yellow squash, zucchini, yams, broccoli, peas, green beans, and avocado. You can also thaw a pack of mixed frozen vegetables.

Fruits should be a very small part of the diet you offer your iguana, and can include melon, strawberries, grapes, plums, mango, papaya, pears, kiwi, peach, banana, figs. Avoid citrus fruits.

As with most animals, provide constant access to fresh, clean water. If possible, provide a water container large enough for the lizard to bath in. Be sure to keep it clean, as iguanas love to defecate in their water dishes.

Housing:

The minimum enclosure size for a green iguana should be 1½ times the length of the lizard in length, 2/3 the length of the lizard in width, and the length of the lizard in height. It is a good idea to plan ahead for growth when purchasing or constructing an enclosure. Iguanas can grow very rapidly, and the cost will be less in the long run if you build for adult sizes even if you have a baby. So, assuming a 6 foot iguana, the ideal minimum size enclosure would be 9 feet long, 4 feet wide and 6 feet high. Aquariums do not make good enclosures for iguanas as they get larger.

Design the enclosure with climbing structures both angled vertically for climbing as well as

horizontally for resting and basking. Branches or shelves should be slightly wider than the lizard.

Lighting and Heating:

Your iguana needs temperatures around 70°F at night, and an ambient temperature between 70°F and 80°F during the day. A hot spot should be provided which reaches about 95°F. We recommend spot lights or ceramic heaters, and do not recommend the use of hot rocks. Hot rocks can develop spots which exceed 110°F and can burn your animal. Reptile day bulbs can be used to provide ambient light and heat, but do not provide UV. **Do not use a white light at night!** A 12 – 14 hour cycle is best for the health of your animal. You must have a temperature gradient so that part of the cage is ambient, and part of it is in the hot spot. This will allow your lizard to thermoregulate and pick its own optimum temperature. Be sure that any bulb of ceramic heater is positioned so that the iguana cannot touch it.

Your green iguana will need a source of UV light which can be obtained through fluorescent bulbs such as repti-sun or vitalight, or specialized reptile mercury vapor bulbs. Be sure that whatever bulb you use specifically states that it provides UVA and UVB.

Humidity:

While iguanas do live in a hot humid environment in the wild, do not try to achieve this effect in an enclosure. Constantly moist conditions without proper ventilation can lead to mold and mildew problems. We suggest lightly misting your iguana and its enclosure at least once a day. The moisture should evaporate within two hours, or it is too moist. Avoid misting shortly before lights out at night.

Choosing an iguana and acclimatizing it to your home:

When choosing a pet, look for an individual that is active and responsive to handling, and which feels strong and muscular. Animals which show loose folds of skin along the body (dehydration); lumps along the body; signs of external parasites such as ticks or mites (look closely around the mouth, eyes, and cloaca); signs of runny or bloody feces in the tank (internal parasites), any discharge of mucus from the mouth, nose, or eyes may be unhealthy. If possible, find out if the animal is eating well, and what it has been fed. It is not unusual for an animal to refuse to feed immediately when you change its environment.

Provide a good set up, and give it some time to adjust to its new home. It may take several weeks for your iguana to settle in. During this time, focus on establishing a routine of feeding and cleaning, but do not attempt to handle the animal unless necessary. You may see aggressive behavior such as head bobbing, tail whipping and hissing.

A visit to a veterinarian is recommended for a fecal exam to detect internal parasites. Take the time to locate and visit a vet in your area who specializes in exotics. Taking this time now will save you a time later should your animal become ill or be injured.

Sources:

Hatfield, James W. III, Green Iguana, the Ultimate Owners Manual. Portland, OR: Dunthorpe Press, 2000. www.iguana.com

de Vosjoli, Phillippe et al., The Green Iguana Manual. Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1995. www.avbooks.com

Kaplan, Melissa, Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection, Iguana Care, Feeding, and Socialization (updated Aug. 12, 2002). <http://www.anapsid.org/iguana/icfs/index.html>, 2002.

For a more detailed information, please read our advanced care sheets at www.grare.org/library/care.html