

Uromastyx Care Sheet

Basic Information and Care Requirements

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Introduction:

The Uromastyx is a very popular pet lizard. They have very distinct personalities and can be quite enjoyable to have in your home, and have the benefit of not growing more than two feet in total length. Unfortunately, they are threatened in their native ranges due to habitat loss and over-harvesting for food and the pet trade.

Basic Information:

Scientific Name – There are 16 species of Uromastyx, with the Egyptian (*Uromastyx aegyptius*), Ornate (*U. ocellatus ornatus*), Ocellated (*U. ocellatus ocellatus*), and the North African (*U. acanthinurus*) being the most common in the pet trade.

Natural Habitat – Arid desert regions, rocky more so than sandy areas.

Size – average length is ~ <1 foot, Maximum ~ 2 feet

Lifespan – expect potentially 12 years or more for a healthy Uromastyx in captivity.

Diet – Omnivorous (primarily herbivorous) – Uromastyx will accept some insect prey as juveniles, progressing to an almost exclusively herbivorous diet as adults. The Egyptian Uro is the least likely to accept insects as an adult.

You will need to provide daily salads for your uromastyx. Salads should consist of dark greens such as collards, turnip greens, dandelion, hibiscus leaves and flowers, 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.) The greens should account for ~70% of the salad. Grated vegetables should include yellow squash, zucchini, yams, broccoli, peas, green beans, and avocado. You can also thaw a pack of mixed frozen vegetables if your lizard is large enough to swallow the pieces. Fruits should be avoided.

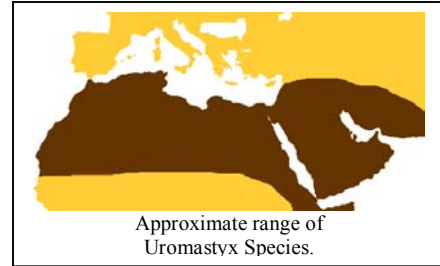
Once each week, offer your lizard bird seed which does not contain sunflower seed. We use millet based parakeet varieties and avian maintenance diets.

Babies and young adults through ~ 15–18 months of age should be offered live food about twice weekly; offer it to adults about once every two weeks. Crickets, waxworms, and mealworms are all good choices. All live prey should be bite sized and easily swallowed. Mealworms should not be the sole source of live prey due to their high chitin content.

Vitamin supplements are a must for uromastyx in captivity. Lightly dust salads with a quality vitamin powder twice weekly for young lizards, and once weekly for adults over ~ 1 year of age.

Uromastyx should not have a dish of water in their cage. They will obtain most of the water they need from their salads, but you can mist them or soak them in a shallow dish once weekly.

Housing: Uromastyx require a fair amount of space. The minimum enclosure size for an adult uromastyx should be around 4 long by 2 feet wide. A 55 gallon aquarium is slightly smaller than this, and would be absolute minimum for 1 lizard. Baby uromastyx should be raised in a smaller enclosure to start with, to ensure that they can find their food easily.



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. Be sure to provide shelters for the lizards to hide under.

Uromastyx can be kept on the following substrates: newsprint, sand/soil mixes, and large pea gravel which is too large for ingestion. Please note – young animals are going to be more prone to ingesting their substrate and may become impacted. We recommend paper for young lizards, and feeding on a flat hard surface for animals housed on loose substrates.

Lighting and Heating: Design your enclosure large enough to provide a temperature range for your animal. Your uromastyx needs temperatures around 75°F on the cool side at night, and an ambient temperature between 80°F and 90°F during the day. A hot spot should be provided which reaches about 100°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 or ceramic heater is positioned so that the lizard cannot touch it.

Your uromastyx 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.

Use several thermometers to check the temperature in the cool side, warm side, and the hot spot. If your lizard tends to stay in certain areas, then those would be good places to monitor the temperature.

Humidity: We suggest lightly misting your uromastyx once weekly. Never mist the enclosure. Uromastyx cannot tolerate moist enclosures; they live in very dry environments. Avoid misting your lizard shortly before lights out at night. Ambient humidity should be below ~60%.

Choosing a lizard and acclimating 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.

Provide a good set up, and give it some time to adjust to its new home. It may take several weeks for your lizard 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 some time later should your animal become ill or be injured.

Sources:

de Vosjoli, Phillippe, Basic Care of Uromastyx, Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 2001.
www.avsbooks.com

Kaplan, Melissa, Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection, Care Sheet for the Genus *Uromastyx* (updated Aug. 11, 2002). <http://www.anapsid.org/bearded.html>, 1995.

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