

Green Iguanas

Nutrition

One of the most common problems encountered when raising iguanas involves improper nutrition. Variety in the diet, and using the proper dietary supplements remain the keys to keeping your pet healthy and maintaining healthy growth.

Iguanas less than 2 years old should be fed daily. After that they should be fed 2-3 times weekly. Despite past opinions to the contrary, Iguanas of any age are vegetarians. This recent discovery, and contradicts what you may find in older instruction manuals which recommend feeding dog food and high protein diets to young iguanas so they can receive the high calcium which is required for proper growth. We now know that iguanas in the wild eat primarily leaves and flowers that are naturally high in calcium, and if that is not duplicated in captivity they are open to the development of soft bones and non-healing fractures, as well as seizures and sudden death.



Good foods:

Collard Greens, bok choy (A Chinese vegetable), turnip greens, mustard greens, kale broccoli leaves (not the tops), dandelion greens, fig leaves, mulberry leaves, and the flowers from Hibiscus, Eugenia & Nasturtiums

Foods to supplement primary sources above:

Yellow squash, pasta, string beans, bean sprouts, tofu, figs, egg whites

Avoid like the plague:

Lettuce, spinach, celery, cucumbers and fruit

The foods that are best for iguanas are those that are high in calcium. Because of this, it would be a good idea to also supplement juvenile iguanas twice weekly with a multivitamin and Calcium supplement. Reptical, Vita-life, Nekton-Rep and other multivitamin powders developed for reptiles can be sprinkled on the foods above. Other good sources of calcium include Calcium Carbonate powder (From health food stores), ground cuttlebone, ground eggshells, palm fronds, mulberry leaves, tums, and parmesan cheese. Once iguanas reach 2 years of age, the supplement should be reduced to once weekly..

Many people feed mealworms and crickets to their iguanas. Beware, because these foods are low in calcium, and more than one iguana has been known to become a cricket junkie. **THIS CAN BE LIFE-THREATENING!** If you do feed mealworms, rear them on a poultry egg-laying feed (8-12% Calcium) for 1-2 weeks prior to feeding. If purchased at a pet store, spray them with aerosolized vegetable oil, then dust them with one of the powders mentioned above. Be very careful of mealworms. Their chitinous exoskeleton can cause obstruction problems in small reptiles, so feed them within 24 hours of a molt.

Temperature:

Iguanas require a temperature of 85 - 103 degrees in their enclosures. Because of this, they will need an external heat source and a glass or plastic cover to their enclosure. Be careful with a wire mesh top to ensure that the temperature stays optimum.

The safest source of heat comes from a source outside the cage. Placing a heating pad underneath the cage provides for a good heat source. Elevate the cage ¼ inch above the pad for

maximum safety. An overhead light, illuminating ½ the cage space is good too. Iguanas like to get their heat sources from basking, so this provides the closest environment to their natural habitat.

Hot rocks and sizzle stones are electronically heated elements that are designed for use in the cage. Be careful with these, the cord can be frayed and bitten with time resulting in electric shock. With larger iguanas, the stone will not heat their entire body, and while they are waiting for that part of their body to heat up, they can suffer very severe burns.



Humidity:

Reptiles also need high humidity to maintain proper health. The plants in the cage (whether plastic or real) should be misted with water twice daily. This also provides a water source for the iguana. A ceramic bowl should be filled with water and placed in the cage as well. Iguanas will use this as a bath, so change the water daily.

Ultraviolet Light Source:

Like all animals, iguanas need an ultraviolet light source to synthesize Vitamin D, which is crucial for proper calcium metabolism. Sunlight filtered through windows or cage glass is insufficient, because glass and most plastics filter UV rays out. During the summer, a few hours in direct sun will help, but you will also need an interior source for fall, spring & winter. Iguanas mostly need UVA radiation, and most bulbs for reptiles will readily provide that type of light. Also, indoor plant "Gro-bulbs" provide that radiation as well. Iguanas do not need a source of UVB rays.

Incandescent

> 5 Feet from Cage
on 10 -12 hours daily
replace every 6 - 7 months

Blacklight

< 18 Inches from Cage
on 8 hours daily
replace every 6 - 12 months

Housing:

It is important to have a cage which is hygienic and is easy to clean. Most bacterial & fungal infections can be directly traced to stool contamination and a damp, must environment. The cage bottom should be covered with newspaper or butcher paper +/- indoor outdoor carpeting. Several pieces of carpeting should be used so one is drying while the other is in use. Avoid corncobs, wood shavings, kitty litter, fine gravel, sand or sawdust. This material is easily contaminated, and can be ingested causing life-threatening obstructions. Avoid moss or naturally growing grass, as their high moisture content can be a problem. Once any urine or fecal matter contaminates the enclosure, it should be cleaned. Avoid using pine scented cleaners and Lysol. They can be toxic.

A firmly attached branch or nonresinous hardwood (oak, birch, apple, pear, or cherry) should be placed in the cage. Make sure the diameter of the branch allows for easy grasping. Driftwood, grapevines or ropes can enrich the environment. Silk, artificial plants are easy to keep clean, and, unlike plastic plants, are not a potential source of obstructions. Real plants are fine, but make sure they aren't toxic.

An area should be set up as a hiding place. Reptiles feel more comfortable if they feel secure. Some will not eat if denied a place to hide.

One Iguana per cage is best. They are very territorial and may fight.

Salmonella:

Salmonella is commonly associated with food poisoning in people but is a normal organism found in the digestive tract of most reptiles. Because of that, after handling iguanas, it is best to wash your hands. Also, ban him from your kitchen for safety's sake. An iguana crawling around on your countertops is dangerous to you and to him.

Keeping your iguanas environment as clean as is possible will prevent the proliferation of these bacteria in the cage, and will keep both you and your pet healthier.