

FAQs

General Care

- **Does my tortoise need water?**

Yes, fresh water should be supplied daily and left in the run, indoor and outdoor. Regular bathing also helps to keep your tortoise hydrated, but should not be a replacement for the water dish

- **How often should I bathe my tortoise?**

Young tortoises (under 1 year) must be bathed daily. However, there is no harm in continuing this practice into adulthood, especially during extreme weather, overwintering, heatwaves, etc.

- **Why should I bath my tortoise?**

Not all tortoises will take themselves into their water bowl for a drink, so it is important to keep control of your tortoise's hydration, to ensure perfect health.

- **What should I feed my tortoise?**

A tortoise's natural diet consists of weeds and flowers. It is important, where possible, to feed as natural a diet as possible. You can find our edible food list in our care booklet, as well as using the plant database; thetortoisetable.org.uk

- **How much and how often should I feed my tortoise?**

As a general rule, you should offer an amount of food equivalent to the size of your tortoise's shell. They should be fed once a day, 5 days a week. The 2 stave days can be implemented at any time, in any order. This allows the slow-working digestive system to catch up, removing the tortoise's need for a self starvation period in the summer.

- **I can't find any weeds or flowers in my garden (winter), what can I feed until Spring?**

Preparation for winter feeding should start in autumn, this will give adequate time for your indoor flowers to grow, ready for feeding. Alternatively, there are a few bits you can buy at the supermarket, but this can only be temporary whilst your flowers are growing.

- **I see pellet food advertised for Mediterranean tortoises, can I feed this instead of weeds?**

No, pellets are unnatural, high in protein, sugars and preservatives, just like feeding a child a complete chocolate diet forever. They also contain ingredients that are addictive, which prevent the tortoise from ever going back to a natural diet (without going through a detox).

- **How often should I put vitamin/calcium powder on my tortoise's food?**

As most vitamin powder contains calcium, please always ensure that you only use one or the other as part of a varied diet. Whichever you choose, it is recommended to sprinkle a light dusting onto food 2-3 times per week.

- **Do I need to worm my tortoise?**

Like cats and dogs, it is important to worm your tortoise as a preventative. We recommend doing this at the end of Autumn/start or Winter and again at the start of spring (after a hibernation as well). It is a simple process that can be done by a vet or using a worming powder from pet shops/online.

- **How often should my tortoise go to the toilet?**

As with all animals and people, timing and consistency of your tortoise's toilet habits will vary depending on what they are eating and how much.

You may see your tortoise excrete "white goo" occasionally, if your tortoise is well hydrated, it will be a yogurt consistency and is a perfectly natural bodily function that can sometimes range from yellow to grey.

- **Will I catch salmonella from my tortoise?**

Tortoises carry the same strain of salmonella as cats and dogs. This strain is only present in the animal's poo. Those who practice good hygiene and wash their hands after handling their pets, pet bedding and cleaning up after their animal, will not catch salmonella.

Children must be supervised and taught very early, the importance of washing hands before and after handling any pet.

- **My combination bulb has blown, how long will my tortoise survive without it?**

Tortoises go all winter with little to no UV in the wild, as long as your tortoise is kept warm, it will survive a couple of weeks if you need time to source another. We recommend keeping a spare combination bulb for emergencies, but a spot bulb will suffice until you source a replacement.

- **What do I do if I find my tortoise on its back?**

The main thing here is not to panic. Although it can seem like your tortoise cannot right itself, there are many tortoises that can. If you find your tortoise on its back close to or under the lamp and you are unsure of how long it has been that way, we recommend putting it in a warm bath. Dehydration is our main concern in this instance with young tortoises.

If you see your tortoise turn over, try not to turn them back right away, fluff up some bedding or move something close to it, so it can push off and attempt to right itself.

For very young tortoises, try to keep the bedding fluffed, so the tortoise tips at an angle and not directly on its back, this way it'll be easier to right itself. Avoid putting things like bridges directly under the lamp, where a tortoise could tip or fall and be exposed under the lamp for a long period.

- **Turtles and Tortoises: What's the difference?**

The main and most important difference that, from experience, many do not know is sink or swim. Tortoises can't swim, though they can hold their breath for a long deep drink, they will sink in water and eventually drown.

If you want to go into more differences, turtles have webbed feet, more amphibious skin (rather than scales) and require access to both land and water deep enough to swim in.

Tortoises, as strictly land animals, only require a water bowl to drink out of and we recommend a daily bath no deeper than under the chin.

Indoor Housing

- **Should I build my tortoise a humid hide (damp moss, misted daily)?**

This is a new fad going around that just doesn't make sense. If your tortoise cannot live in a high humidity vivarium, why would it need a humid area in its lovely airy tortoise table? Tortoises do not like cold, damp areas or high humidity. High humidity is the main cause of respiratory infection and accelerated growth, which in turn results in MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease)

- **Which is best for my tortoise, tortoise table or vivarium?**

Vivariums are only suitable for tropical species such as Red-Foot and Yellow-Foot tortoises who originate from hot, humid areas. Most other species need low humidity and lots of air, making the tortoise table a better option.

- **Does my tortoise need a night light and/or heat mat?**

There is no sun to provide heat and light at night in the wild, therefore, it is not necessary in captivity.

With heat mats, they are generally recommended to be placed in the bedroom, this is your tortoise's cool spot to escape the heat and cool down, it should never be heated. Combination and/or spot bulbs provide enough heat for the roaming area, leaving heat mats another unnecessary product.

- **How far from my tortoise should my combination lamp be?**

It is important to check the recommendation on the box of your bulb as distance varies on the wattage. You must also own a thermometer to ensure the height is correct and providing a heat of 32-35 degrees celsius, with the thermometer resting on top of the bedding/substrate.

- **What are my options when it comes to bedding?**

There are a number of bedding/substrates available for tortoises. We personally very much like to use dry bedding, such as Aspen (a soft shredded wood based substrate), Kritters Crumble (a less soil based version of coconut husk) and Pellet bedding (compressed grass pellets). These options are organic, tortoise friendly and leave less dust than soil based products.

- **Where is the best place to put my tortoise table, when I get it home?**

Your tortoise table needs to be situated in a room that is lived in, to ensure the ambient room temperature is around 22-25 degrees during the day. Ideally away from windows, doors or general draughts.

Be aware that households with pets and small children, as well as having a mesh lid for the table, should also seek a higher area to place the tortoise table that is out of reach.

- **How long and when should my lighting be on?**

Your combination lighting (or separate UV and spot light) should be on for 8-10 hours during the day. It should never be left on at night, nor should it contradict natural daylight, unless overwintering.

- **What do I need to know about using a mercury vapour combination bulb/lamp?**

Mercury vapour bulbs, although they have a long lifespan, can seem quite temperamental. Knocks, tilts and loosening of the bulb/lamp can cause the bulb to flicker or cut out. Your lamp needs to be suspended vertically, with the bulb screwed in tight. Tightening regularly will help avoid cutting out in the middle of the day (only tighten your bulb when it is switched off and cooled down).

If your bulb is flickering, it can seem like wiggling the wires is connected to the flickering in your bulb and seems to “fix” the issue. However, all you are doing is damaging your lamp. The bulb will flicker when the gases are unbalanced, as a result of any kind of knock, tilting or loosening of the lamp. It is pure coincidence that moving the wire settles the gases and your bulb stops flickering. This is all down to the movement of the bulb itself.

Your lamp will not switch on instantly after being switched off. Mercury vapour bulbs contain a small amount of gas, which needs to have cooled completely for the bulb to work. Always allow 20 minutes for your bulb to cool down, before attempting to switch it back on.

Reptile lamps are equipped with a failsafe, this means that sometimes when your lamp blows, the net bulb you put in may not work. This is unlikely a fault with your lamp, but the failsafe, which blows the fuse to prevent any serious incidents. Check your lamp with a household bulb before putting a new mercury vapour bulb in and then change the fuse if necessary.

If you are blowing multiple bulbs, we recommend investing in a surge protector. You may think surges do not affect you, due to your tortoise lamp being the only electrical in the house affected, however, this is down to the sensitive nature of reptile lighting, they will feel a surge a lot more than your household bulbs, as they are built for heat rather than light and have higher failsafe sensitivity.

Outdoor Housing

- **Can my tortoise go outside unsupervised?**

No, tortoises, regardless of size, should either be supervised or in a wooden run with a mesh top to protect from predators.

Birds of all sizes will try to pick up a tortoise, and often succeed.

- **Can my tortoise stay outside at night?**

No, the natural nighttime temperature your tortoise would experience in the wild is very high compared to our rubbish summers and cool nights. It will be too cold, causing your tortoise to feel the need to dig.

There is also a higher risk of predators at night, foxes, cats, owls, rats and even dogs.

- **How will I know when it is warm enough to put my tortoise outside?**

T-shirt weather is tortoise weather. If it is warm enough for you to sit outside comfortably, without a jacket (sun and shade), it is warm enough for your tortoise.

- **Why can't I find a tortoise that can live outside all year round, like my parents/grandparents tortoise?**

We know a lot more now than we did back then. There are no tortoises that originate from this country, because we do not have the correct climate to suit any species. Therefore, we should not be keeping our tortoises outdoors all year round.

Remember, just because they're alive doesn't mean they're healthy.

Certificates, Licensing and Microchipping

- **Does my tortoise need a licence?**

Certain species do require an Article 10 Certificate. Some of the species that require a certificate are Hermanns, Marginated and all sub-species of Spur-Thigh. It is the responsibility of the seller to apply for the certificate, so you do not have to worry about getting one before buying a tortoise.

- **How do I know if my tortoise is microchipped?**

On the article 10 certificate under the hatch date, there will be a long number, this is your tortoise's microchip number.

- **Do I need to register my microchip?**

Your tortoise's microchip is likely to be a blank microchip. It may not be registered to the breeder, the shop,, or yourself. In that case you will need to register your microchip on Pet Registry UK with your own name, address and contact details.