

The most commonly available turtles in New Zealand are Red Ears and Snake-necks.

SNAKE-NECK TURTLES

Snake-neck turtles are an Australian turtle identified by their grey/black body and long neck that it tucks sideways into its shell. They grow to about 20 – 25 cms long in the shell. The snake-neck is a hardy and intelligent turtle. Hand feeding these turtles when they get bigger requires very quick reflexes, however as long as food isn't around these turtles are not biters and are very tame.

RED EARED TURTLES

These are the most common turtles in the world! Identified by the red marking on the ear, grow to around 25 cm and live for about 45 – 50 years.

They are easy to keep, are great sun worshippers and won't bite your fingers if you want to give hand feeding a try. If they get too big for tanks they can adapt to garden ponds, but check with your local pet store first.

DIET

Turtles can only swallow under water. Make sure that the water is deep enough. A good quality Turtle Food should be purchased from your pet shop. This should contain calcium, minerals and vitamins essential for the development of a turtle's shell and its well being.

Turtles are omnivorous in that they eat meat and plants. Hatchling turtles are carnivorous and in addition to Turtle food require live food.

This can consist of washed garden worms chopped up, water boatman, mosquito larvae, small woodlice, tadpoles, and crushed garden snails free of poisoning from snail and slug pellets (shell and all).

As turtles get older they become more omnivorous. Turtles love puha, oxygen weed and other aquatic plants.

Hatchling turtles should be fed twice daily at the same times each day and adult turtles once a day at the same time each day. Turtles will normally consume twice their head size in food each feeding however if your turtle wants more don't hesitate to give it a little extra.

When feeding turtles it's possible to get your turtle to accept its food in a feeding container, separate to its tank. This will help to keep your tank a lot cleaner. The water in the feeding container should be that of the turtle's tank.

TANK SIZES

The smallest tank suitable for one hatchling turtle is 60cm x 30cm x 30cm. With a pair of well fed hatchlings this tank would only last 6 months. A pair of turtles 15 – 20 cm long in shell will require a minimum tank size of 120 cm x 60 cm x 60 cm. Turtles eat fish so they should not be housed in the same tank.

LIGHTING

Turtles require a minimum of five hours of natural light per day or ten hours of artificial light per day. Do not place your turtle's tank in direct sun light as this may cook your pet. When using artificial lighting purchase fluorescent tubes that are specially formulated to provide your turtle with the correct levels of light it needs to produce Vitamin D3. Your pet store will be able to advise you on the correct lighting.

Always have a place for the turtle to sunbathe. It is best to slope the sunbathing area so that the turtle may choose the position most suitable.

TEMPERATURE

Turtles require their tanks to be heated to around 25°C - 28°C. Turtles start slowing down and stop eating at around 15°C and will fully hibernate at around 10°C

WATER

There is no need to age the water. If possible try to undertake a 50% water change every day or two. For every gram of solid matter excreted a turtle excretes four – five grams of urine. Make sure the entire tank and equipment (filters, heaters, stones etc) is cleaned thoroughly each week.

WATER DEPTH

There is no maximum water depth for your tank. The minimum depth should be twice the length of the shell however turtles are excellent climbers, so don't have the water (or sunbathing area) too near the top of the tank. A drop of 50cm or more onto a hard surface may kill a turtle.

COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS

SOFT SHELL

Is caused by a lack of adequate light and/or Vitamin D. Correct inadequacies by providing extra sunlight and more calcium in the diet. Your pet store can advise you on the correct calcium supplement to use.

PNEUMONIA

Turtles can easily catch a chill which will quickly lead to pneumonia. Most chills arise from the following: no lid on the tank i.e. cold air and warm water, taking your turtle outside on a cold day, having your turtle out of its tank when your room is quite cold and if your turtle tank is not heated.

Providing turtles have adequate sunlight, a varied diet and clean warm conditions it is highly unlikely that you will ever experience any health problems with your turtle.

SALMONELLA

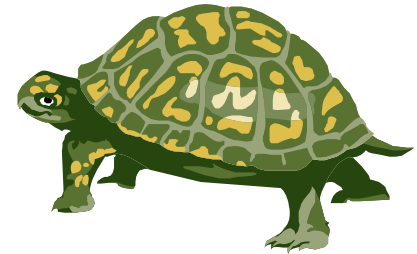
Like chickens, turtles are natural carriers of this disease. Strict standards of hygiene must always be observed when handling turtles. Children must be especially careful.

Remember this is basic information only. Ask your pet store retailer to recommend suitable books or products for your pet or contact your vet for more advice.

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TURTLES



The Pet Industry Association of New Zealand is a specialist trade group within the New Zealand Retailers Association Inc.