

Reptile-Safe Plants for Every Level of Light!

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Did you know that not all plants like to be in bright light all of the time? In fact, just like reptiles, different plants are adapted to making the most of different levels of light in their environment.

In outdoor gardening, plants' light needs are categorized as: Shade, Part Shade, Part Sun, and Full-Sun.

In indoor gardening, plants' light needs are categorized as: Low Light, Indirect Light, and Direct Light. Sometimes light recommendations are labeled as: No Window, East/West Window, or South Window instead.

Each of these categories assumes that the sun is the source of light. But when you're growing plants in a vivarium, the source of light is a T5 HO fluorescent or multi-diode LED lamp. Although these lamps may seem bright to you, the fact is that they're still nowhere near as powerful as direct sunlight.

Does this mean that full-sun/direct sun plants can't thrive in a vivarium? Fortunately, no, as many reptile keepers have been able to successfully grow plants with high light requirements. According to anecdotal reports, the brightest grow lamps on the market seem to be enough to nourish high-light plants with all-day exposure.

Shade

Reptiles that are likely to prefer a shady environment include crepuscular and nocturnal species, or extremely under-pigmented morphs such as leucistic or albino.

Plants that do well or prefer a shady environment may be categorized as “full shade,” “low light,” or “north exposure.”

Compatible plants:

- Moderate moisture
 - o Variegated ivy
 - o Pothos
 - o Spider plant
 - o Heart leaf philodendron
 - o Cast iron plant
- High moisture
 - o Creeping fig
 - o Selaginella
 - o Sweetheart ivy
 - o Calathea

In a reptile vivarium, heat and UVB lamps are not enough to provide the visible light levels needed to meet a “shade” plant’s needs for long-term wellbeing. Because of photosynthesis, while some can limp along better than others, the bottom line is that no plant can survive without light. Suitable lighting arrangements for shade-tolerant plants are likely to be a half-length single Bio Dude Solar Grow or a half-length Bio Dude Glow & Grow that is on for only 4-6 hours/day.

Moderate Light

Reptiles that are likely to prefer a moderate light environment are crepuscular and nocturnal species with access to plenty of cover, or diurnal species that spend their time in a shaded environment such as the forest floor.

Plants that do well in a moderate light environment are likely to be categorized as “part shade,” “indirect sunlight,” or “east/west exposure.”

Compatible plants:

- Low moisture
 - o Gasteria
 - o Haworthia
 - o Snake plant
- Moderate moisture
 - o Green ivy
 - o Dracaena
 - o Peperomia
 - o Rex begonia
 - o Blue star fern
 - o Fiddle leaf fig
 - o Ficus Audrey
 - o Monstera
 - o Homalomena

- Schefflera
- Tillandsia
- Bromeliad “Pink Quill”
- Wandering Jew
- High moisture
 - Neanthe Bella Palm
 - Black jewel orchid
 - Begonia “Iron Cross”
 - Pillow moss
 - Sheet moss
 - Boston fern

Suitable lighting arrangements for a moderate-light species are likely to be a full-length Bio Dude Solar Grow or half-length Bio Dude Glow & Grow with all-day exposure.

Bright Light

Reptiles that are likely to prefer a brightly-lit environment are diurnal species that live in the forest canopy or environments with little cover, such as grasslands and deserts.

Plants that do well in a bright light environment are likely to be categorized as, “part/full sun,” “direct sun,” or “south exposure.”

Compatible plants:

- Low moisture
 - Elephant feed
 - Spineless opuntia cactus (prickly pear)
 - Sempervivum
 - Aloe
 - Gasteraloe
 - Tiger’s jaw
 - Echeveria
- Moderate moisture
 - Croton
- High moisture
 - Gardenia
 - Pitcher plant
 - Bromelia neoreglia

Suitable lighting arrangements for bright-light species are likely to be at least two full-length Bio Dude Solar Grow lamps or one full-length Bio Dude Glow & Grow lamp, with all-day exposure.

Keep in mind that not all full-sun plants are heat-tolerant, so if your reptile requires high temperatures, choose your plants carefully!

Conclusion

When choosing plants for your reptile's bioactive setup, select plants based on your reptile's light preferences first, then time and add 6400K grow lamps to the setup as appropriate.

Because artificial lights simply aren't powerful enough to replicate sunlight, most shade-tolerant plants will do fine with indirect illumination, and those that need moderate light or more are likely to do fine with direct artificial illumination, but if you want to use light-loving plants, make sure to have a diurnal species of reptile that tolerates plenty of light in its environment, or be prepared to plant heavily in order to provide enough cover that your pet won't become stressed.