

Sulcata Tortoise care and captive maintenance - BIG BULLDOZERS!

[RSS](#)



Sulcata tortoise care and captive maintenance

African spur thighed tortoise

Geochelone sulcata

Requirements

- [Enclosure for juvenile](#)
- [Terra sahara kit](#)

- [Basking lamp](#)
- Plug-in lamp dimmer
- UVB - now this is dependent on which type of enclosure you have. A 6% - 14% may be necessary depending on height of the indoor enclosure. Please email us at customercare@thebiodude.com so we can give the proper recommendation.
- [Plant lights](#)
- [Zilla 24/7 Digital Timer Power Center](#) power strip timer
- Temp gun
- [Exo Terra 2qt Mister](#) sprayer
- [Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer](#)
- [Clean up crew -dragon pack](#)
- [Plant packs](#)
- [Wood decor](#)
- Water bowls / food bowls terra cotta flower pot base works for both
- [Vitamins herptivite](#) -

Ask yourself these questions: Have you ever wanted to own a lawn-mowing tank? A tank that may live for 100 plus years, 70-90 pounds, 24-30 inches long, but will follow you like a dog? Then this is your tortoise!

Known as a sulcata, or an african spur-thighed tortoise, they are named after their defense of tucking their thick armoured front legs in to guard their face from predators. Hatching's are very small, usually about 2-3 inches. Neonates grow to be the third largest tortoise on our planet and can take 15 to 20 years to become fully grown, given the proper care. They are a very popular reptile in the pet trade with captive bred specimens readily available. According to the [IUCN Red List these tortoises are being currently listed as ENDANGERED](#) in the arid African sahara

desert they originate from. With that being said, it is imperative for us as ethical reptile keepers to understand this; and be financially devoted for a very long period of time. If you feel that you are going to be unable to provide a long term, high standard of care that requires a large amount of financial upkeep, this tortoise is not a great pet when looking at that standard of care. It is our ethical responsibility to ensure quality care given their current IUCN standard.

Requirements based off 40 gallon minimum for a baby tortoise and a custom adult enclosure

Terrarium

To start with a neonatal Sulcata tortoise a 40 gallon breeder is acceptable to raise your tortoise without him/her breaking the glass. You can also utilize large "tortoise tubs" or stock water tubs, but as they grow will need to be updated to a large custom indoor or outdoor space. Any space given should be large enough with room to roam, multiple hiding spots, a humid hiding area and a large shallow dish for water. Once the tortoise reaches a carapace length of about 4" is when glass needs to be replaced with a more sturdy material to reinforce the cage.

For any size of sulcata, mainly adults, it's important to remember "if they can see through it---they're going to go through it". Everything and anything indoor to outdoor needs to be built with that fact in mind, concealing every fence hole, gate crack, protecting anything that can be moved. If you don't think they could move it, there's a good chance they will. This includes toilets, sheet rock, AC units, digging under sheds and cracking the foundation, ect. Given enough room to explore and dig, the damage to any outdoor area will be minimal to a few holes.

Adults are best kept outside in the southern states due to the weather being perfect for them. Northerners have compromised with most basements or enclosed porches being renovated with materials meant for easier cleaning and extra wall protection since they've been known to ram through walls. Concrete and quick-crete are a good building choice for this species, Adults get simply too large and tank-like to be kept otherwise.

As this is common to their nature, they will dig deep holes and constantly ram things. It is important whatever is used for enclosure or decor is sturdy all around. A large pool to soak in is always appreciated with this species.

Substrate

For any size enclosure we recommend the dude's [terra sahara](#) for the substrate. They will use it to dig so it needs to be deep enough that they can completely and safely submerge themselves. It should be noted that the dude's substrate can be utilized outside as well.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoTe_FWYrys

With very large builds that can be very challenging. A homemade DIY approach with substrate can also be applied with a large method like this. It is very important that if the tortoise is in an

enclosed area that it is well ventilated, to protect from the constant dust that will come from digging and rampaging the enclosure; that is why your substrate is very important, especially with indoor enclosures. Maintaining humidity for neonates can be done with Spag Moss or a humid hide.

Decor and plants

All decor will need to be sturdy as it will be moved around or tunneled under. They will need a few hides for plenty of cover to get away from light, plants and wood pieces help with this and act as enrichment. For smaller tortoises they can be hides found with large openings, stacked slate pieces, concrete or log chunks made into a hide or something built. Larger tortoises seem to be good with dog igloos, Which may seem funny but are very sturdy and withstand outdoor elements well.

The [bearded dragon plant pack](#) is a perfect kit for this species, as they're all edible and the terra sahara substrate is good for the plant's growth. We always recommend setting up the enclosure before the tortoise is put inside so the plants can be quarantined and as well started as possible before they get devoured or trampled. In the event of an outdoor enclosure or large indoor the larger arid shrubs can be attempted, such as established large Hibiscus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhqCxEgwD3A>

Heating/Lighting

This is a diurnal species, being active during the day they need a good bright desert animal worthy basking spot with UVB. We use both [6% and 12% UVB](#) but that depends on the amount of plant and decor coverage inside the enclosure. For basking lamps we use higher wattage bulbs, or add extra heating elements to create the correct hotspot the tortoise wants to bake under. The wattage of this bulb depends on the sizing of the enclosure as well. Both UVB and basking lamps can be utilized outside for extra husbandry security.

Basking and night heat - Do not use red bulbs!

Heating daytime ambient Terrarium Temperature: 75-90°F

- Basking Spot: 93-96°F

- Nighttime Temperature: 60-75°F

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q3P8T49NTA>

For the plants LED light a [16 inch glow and grow](#) would be good however we prefer to use the 22 inch glow and grow as it gives a better light range for the plants all over the enclosure. Again, depending on what type of enclosure you are attempting the lighting may have to be something such as a T5 or T8 lighting or commercial LED lighting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVtO78FPMI>

Humidity -

It's very common to see that this species doesn't need a water source or that they receive all of their hydration from their food, but this is not the best way to keep them. Neonates will dehydrate quickly, as they hatch during the rainy seasons in their habitat. It is in good practice to ensure that fresh water is offered on a daily basis. Adults and juveniles alike will love a good spray down every now and then. We like using terracotta plant pot bases as a water dish as they are shallow and allow the tortoise to climb in and out easily. Not only can they be scrubbed easily to disinfect your younger tortoise can go in and out as they please.

Food/Water-

Sulcatas are a very food motivated species. They eat a lot, eating everything available like a trash can with legs. It's important to have pesticide- and herbicide-free grass plants and vegetables. You can also utilize the Dude's ReptiSeeds to grow assorted grasses and clovers for grazing opportunities for indoor enclosures.

A large amount of the diet needs to be grasses and hays. Timothy hay, oat hay, clover. Vegetables and greens need to make up the second largest amount of the diet, with fruits and sugary foods, edible flowers like hibiscus, most wildflowers, dandelions and rose petals making up the smallest part of the diet. The harder vegetables can be shredded on a grater for the smaller tortoises, while the larger tortoises can take big bites you can shred them for the adults as well. Cactus pads seem to be an all around favorite and available in most supermarkets, squash, corn, pumpkins and sweet potato, Collard greens, dandelion greens, mustard greens and kale are also staples.

Mazuri tortoise diet should also be added to give variety. Avoid spinach and kale in large quantities or often -there are chemicals inside that prevent them from absorbing calcium properly.

Handling

I mean lets be honest here, you can pick up a tortoise but you can't really handle one. Especially when they are 35 inches and 100 plus pounds. Feeding them seems to be the best and easiest way to associate and bond with them.

-E. Grosenheider

The Dude Abides