

Turtle Basics

NOTE: It is illegal to keep turtles caught from the wild. Turtles must be purchased from licensed dealers and are governed by size and species regulations. Check with the Department of Sustainability & Environment (www.dse.vic.gov.au) regarding specific regulations.

Currently only two species of turtle can legally be kept in Victoria without a permit; the Eastern or Common Long-necked (or Snake-Necked) Tortoise; *Chelodina longicollis* and the Murray (or Macquarie) Short-necked Turtle; *Emydura macquarii*.

Checklist

- Glass aquarium (minimum 90cm long, 35cm wide)
- Gravel substrate
- High quality filter
- Heater & thermometer
- Chlorine & chloramine neutralizer with stress aid (water ager)
- General hardness (gH) & carbonate hardness (KH) generators
- Calcium block with anti bacterial properties
- Sludge remover or 'Cycle' bacteria booster (preferable)
- Turtle 'dock' or land area
- UVA/UVB fluorescent light tube
- Basking lamp
- pH, gH & kH test kits
- Magnetic glass cleaner
- Gravel siphon
- Food
- Calcium & vitamin supplements

Step 1

Rinse tank, gravel & accessories thoroughly in tap water. Ideally place your aquarium away from windows or direct sunlight to minimise algae growth. Turtles require a dry basking area where they can sun themselves in order to dry out their shell. This is easily achieved with a turtle 'dock' (dry land area with ramp access), heated to 25°C- 30°C during daylight hours with a basking lamp mounted 15-25cm directly above. A ventilated cover is required to reduce humidity and condensation and prevent skin and respiratory conditions.

Step 2

Add gravel and fill your aquarium with cold tap water as deep as the length of your turtle's shell. Add calcium block, water ager & gH & kH generators as per directions. Add heater, thermometer & accessories & let sit for 12 hours. Test water to ensure correct water parameters (temperature; 24°C, pH; 7, gH; 8°- 12°, kH; 7°- 8) and adjust as required (see B.A. staff if unsure on how to do this). Mount the basking lamp and UVA/UVB light (for use during the day) and ensure light is not obstructed by glass or plastic. Turtles have specific UVA & UVB light requirements necessary for the production of vitamin D, which is required for the health and integrity of their bones and shell. See B.A. for specific UVA/UVB fluorescent tube output recommendations.

Step 3

Purchase your freshwater turtle from a licensed dealer & check that the water parameters in its old home are similar to those in its new aquarium. Select turtles that are active and have bright eyes. Check that the nose & mouth are free from mucous or saliva & that the shell & skin are fungus free. To avoid unnecessary stress, it is recommended that you do not handle your new turtle for a few days or until it has adjusted to its new surroundings.



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Turtle Basics cont.

Maintenance

Remove 10% of aquarium water every week using a gravel siphon. Add water ager & gH & kH generators to the aquarium in quantities suitable for the new water you will be adding. Replace calcium block if necessary & add sludge remover/'Cycle' as per directions. Replace removed water with cold tap water. Clean aquarium glass with a magnetic glass cleaner. Rinse or replace filter sponges in removed aquarium water as required (do not rinse in tap water as this will destroy beneficial filtration bacteria). Remove & clean filter impeller & impeller cavity every 6 weeks or as required (see B.A. Filter Maintenance care sheet). Replace fluorescent tube every 10-12 months.

Health

When kept in the correct conditions turtles can make hardy & rewarding pets. At the first signs of illness (fungus, soft shell, difficulty breathing, discharge from nose or mouth, holding head up continually, drooping head, lethargy, blowing bubbles, or swollen areas around neck, legs or eyes) contact a veterinary surgeon.

Feeding

Freshwater turtles should not be fed in water below 23°C as this can cause digestive problems, or above 30°C as this can lead to regurgitation. Freshwater turtles are basically carnivorous & will only feed in water. Hand feeding will prevent excess food fouling the aquarium water & assist in hand taming whilst a varied diet high in calcium, vitamin A and D3 will maximize health. A good quality turtle pellet should be supplemented with live fish & earthworms & frozen whole fish, prawns & black shrimp. Do not feed your turtle beef heart or mince as it will have difficulty breaking down the disproportionately high fat levels. Frozen food should be defrosted prior to feeding and calcium and vitamin supplements added. Turtles hibernate during cooler weather and should not be fed a month prior, or during this period. Turtles kept warm during winter will not hibernate but may have reduced appetites.

Tips

- In Australia there are no set rules about the terms 'turtle' & 'tortoise' and the term 'freshwater turtle' is commonly used & recognized for a number of freshwater species.
- Male turtles have a slightly concave plastron (chest) & a longer tail than the same sized female, however these characteristics are usually not obvious in Long Necks.
- Turtles require a definite day/night cycle so the use of a timer linked to your light is highly recommended.
- Regularly test your water for ammonia, nitrite & nitrate levels to ensure your biological filtration is sufficient and your maintenance routine is adequate (see B.A. Biological Basics care sheet for further information).

FRESHWATER TURTLE CONSERVATION

- Almost 67% of the world's freshwater turtles and tortoises are listed as threatened in the 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and many new Australian species will be included the moment they are described by science.
- The Australian Freshwater Turtle Conservation and Research Association (AFTCRA) is a 100% not-for-profit organisation run completely by volunteers who's mission is to protect all Australian freshwater turtle species and to prevent extinction by ensuring sustainable populations can and do exist in the wild.
- By becoming a member, adopting a turtle or by purchasing some of their merchandise you will enable AFTCRA to conduct field research, monitor water quality, improve habitat conditions, purchase vital equipment and promote awareness through education.

Feel free to contact the friendly staff at Boronia Aquarium for further information



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