



REDFOOT TORTOISE CARE

OVERVIEW

The redfoot tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*) is a medium-sized tortoise that ranges from southern Central America to northern and northwestern South America. Adults typically are 11-14" in length, with rare specimens reaching 18". The "cherry head" variety from the east of its range (Brazil) is smaller. They are omnivorous. They eat mostly fruit when available, but also include grasses, flowers, fungi, carrion, and invertebrates in their diet. The lifespan of a redfoot tortoise may exceed 50 years.

DIET

Redfoot tortoises are opportunistic and omnivorous grazers that feed on a variety of plants and fruits, but also include carrion, insects and worms in their diet. Ideally their diet should contain a **wide variety** of weed leaves and flowers (e.g. dandelion), greens (e.g., turnip and mustard greens, collards, kale, leaf lettuce, escarole, chicory), vegetables (e.g., squash, zucchini, carrot) and fruit (e.g., papaya, mango, cactus pads/fruit, melon, apples without seeds), **plus some form of animal protein**. They require a bit more protein than most commonly kept tortoises and will not fare well on a strictly herbivorous diet. Most keepers will offer their tortoises butterworms, superworms, "real" worms, slugs, thawed pinkie and weanling mice or cooked chicken, shrimp, or boiled egg two or three times a month. We do not recommend using cat or dog food or grain-based tortoise pellets.

WATER

Redfoot tortoises should have access to water and a humid hiding spot at all times. They are very prone to dehydration. Soaking once a week is also advised. When tortoises drink or soak they will often defecate and it is imperative that the shallow water area be kept very clean at all times.

SUBSTRATE

Redfoot tortoises are prone to dehydration and dry conditions can lead to bumpy or pyramided shells. Some keepers prefer to use cypress mulch and a



humid hide filled with moist long fiber sphagnum moss, while others use solely long fiber sphagnum moss for young redfoots and add topsoil and coconut coir as a base to the sphagnum moss as the tortoises grow. Always provide a humid retreat and a shallow pan of clean water large enough to allow soaking.

HOUSING

Young redfoots may be raised indoor in a shallow Rubbermaid tub or similar container like one used for mixing cement. Redfoots adapt to a wide range of temperatures, but a heat lamp (e.g., 100 watt T-Rex UVHeat flood light*) that provides a basking spot of about 88-93°F should be suspended above one end of the enclosure. Raise or lower the heat lamp to get the correct temperature. Redfoot tortoises are most active at temperatures from 81-86°F. The cooler end of the enclosure should be in the 75-78°F during the day. At night when the light is off the temperature can drop as low as 70°F. If the nighttime temperatures drop below 70°F you should use a small heat mat controlled by a thermostat to correct the situation. Place it beneath the enclosure at the basking end. Ideally the mat should cover about 1/3 of the floor space. This will provide a temperature gradient that allows the tortoises to thermoregulate.

For larger tortoises kept indoors it is best to build a "tortoise table". See http://redfoottortoise.com/tortoise_table.htm. Keepers should research providing older redfoot tortoises with outdoor pens during weather that is within the safe temperature range.

** Some keepers debate whether UV light is necessary and cite the fact that this tortoise lives in the shade, wallowing in the mud in the rainforest. Some believe that the UV light may damage the tortoise's eyes. As long as the light is suspended high enough and a hiding place is provided there should be no problem.*

NOTE

Many young redfoot tortoises in the pet trade have been hatched and farm raised in countries of origin like Guyana. It is recommended to have a qualified reptile veterinarian perform a fecal analysis for internal parasites and treat accordingly.