



## Bearded Dragon Husbandry

### Introduction

Pogona also known as a Bearded Dragon originates from all over Australia. They can be found in arid and subtropical woodlands, savannas, deserts and scrublands. They are considered semi-arboreal which means they are great climbers and can be found basking in high surfaces. Temperament can vary but most CB (captive bred) will tolerate handling and can be very active and social. Their famous beard is used for mating and displaying aggression. Bearded Dragons make great pets for beginner reptile keepers due to their calm nature.

### Housing

Juvenile BD's (Bearded Dragon) can be housed in a 20-gal terrarium; anything smaller is not recommended. If properly housed, BD's will grow quickly so a 20gal will last a few months only. An adult should be housed in nothing smaller than a 4'x2'x2' custom enclosure. Bearded Dragons are very active creatures that enjoy climbing. Providing large branches or climbing areas will be very beneficial to your BD's physical and mental health. Failure to provide an enclosure with enrichment will lead to a very dull Bearded Dragon. This can lead to other health issues such as obesity and aggression. You should never cohabit Bearded Dragons, they are solitary animals. Cohabiting BD's can lead to aggressive behavior, injuries and even death. Cohabited BD's will fight for resources leading to one not getting the proper care it requires.

### Substrate

You will hear many debates about keeping bearded Dragons on loose substrate. Warnings are given about the possibility of impaction. Impaction occurs when the loose substrate is ingested causing a blockage in the intestines. This is true for some certain types of loose substrate but not all. Some of the substrates to avoid are:

- Wood Chips
- Corn Cob
- Shell (Dessert Blend)
- Bark Chips
- Gravel
- Crushed Walnut

### Temperature

Like all reptiles, Bearded Dragons need a thermal gradient in their enclosure. This means one or more basking spots to choose from at different temperatures and cooler areas. This allows your BD to thermoregulate which is important to maintain good health. Placing a basking bulb over a branch or a rock will create a natural basking area. If the enclosure is large enough, provide multiple basking areas with different wattage bulbs. If you provide multiple basking areas avoid having them too far apart from each other. Choosing the correct basking bulb can be complicated because there are so many to choose from. When choosing a basking bulb, take the size of the BD's enclosure into consideration. The smaller the enclosure, the lower the wattage of the bulb should be. The larger the enclosure, the higher the wattage of the bulb. Using multiple low wattage bulbs next to each other is recommended to create a large basking area, rather than using just one large high wattage bulb. You can find many choices at your local pet store, avoid red bulbs and black lights. You can also use household bulbs to achieve desired temps. This is more cost effective and you will be able to provide heat, UVA and visible light. For large enclosures a PAR38 Halogen Flood Light can be very effective. For smaller enclosures, a good quality household flood reflector type bulb with a wide range beam can work. Desired basking temps should range from 100 F-108F, 104F being the desired temp. Ambient temperatures should range from 80 F-85F with a cool side ranging from 77F-82F. Nighttime temperatures should range from 65F-70F and you should not leave any heat source or lights on at night unless temperatures drop below 60F. If temperatures drop below 60F a CHE (Ceramic Heat Emitter) is recommended to use at night. This will only provide heat and no visible light at night not causing any disturbance to the BD's sleep pattern.

### UVB

UVB is extremely important for Bearded Dragons and should be provided 12-14 hrs a day. Without UVB lighting, BD's cannot synthesize vitamin D3 in their skin. Vitamin D3 is needed to enable the absorption of calcium from the gut; calcium is essential for bone health and growth and for normal muscle function, among other things. Adequate vitamin D3 is also vital for the

normal functioning of the immune system, and has complex influences on the brain and behavior, the heart, the pancreas, the skin and many other organ systems. It also plays an important role in the prevention of cancer. Failure to provide adequate vitamin D3 and calcium will lead to MBD (Metabolic Bone Disease). MBD is one of the most common diseases seen in reptiles in captivity, but it's very preventable. Vitamin D3 can be provided with vitamin supplements but it is much more natural and reliable to allow the BD to synthesize its own vitamin D3 by providing a good UVB lamp. Regular household bulbs will not put out UVB, you will need to buy a special bulb that emits UVB. There are four types of UVB bulbs:

1. Standard (T8) UVB fluorescent tubes and compact lamps (coil lamps)
2. T5 High-Output (T5-HO) UVB fluorescent tubes
3. UVB-emitting mercury vapor lamps
4. UVB-emitting metal halide lamps.

Avoid using Compact Lamps (coil lamps) as they do not meet the UVB requirements for a Bearded Dragon and most reptiles. Compact lamps will only provide UVB directly under the bulb and have a very weak UVB output. The recommended brands for a BD are: Arcadia T5 D3+ 12% UVB Tube and Reptisun T5 HO 10.0 UVB Tube. These bulbs should be changed every 6-12 months (Arcadia 12 and Reptisun 6) as they will continue to put out light but no UVB over time. Keep in mind when using these bulbs, you will need the correct fixture for the bulb to correctly function. A T5 HO (high output) fixture is required for a T5 bulb rather than a T8 fixture. The T5 HO fixture should not be any closer than 12 inches from the dragon at the closest point. T5 bulbs are functionally placed on screen mesh or inside the enclosure. T8 bulbs should always be mounted inside the enclosure due to lower output, the mesh will filtrate the UVB.

## Diet

Bearded Dragons are omnivores, meaning they eat insects and vegetation. Vegetation should be offered more often than insects; overfeeding insects can lead to obesity. Fruits should also be fed in moderation. Recommended foods include:

Vegetables & Fruits:

- |                    |                  |                 |              |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| ● Collard Greens   | ● Blueberries    | ● Zucchini      | ● Grapefruit |
| ● Dandelion Greens | ● Tomatoes       | ● Bell Peppers  | ● Guava      |
| ● Endive           | ● Acorn Squash   | ● Cucumber      | ● Mango      |
| ● Carrots          | ● Asparagus      | ● Yellow Squash | ● Melons     |
| ● Bok Choy         | ● Cabbage        | ● Apples        | ● Papaya     |
| ● Turnip Greens    | ● Celery         | ● Apricot       | ● Watermelon |
| ● Alfalfa Sprouts  | ● Kale           | ● Blackberries  | ● Peaches    |
| ● Strawberries     | ● Mustard greens | ● Chayote       |              |
| ● Figs             | ● Parsnips       | ● Cherries      |              |
|                    | ● Radicchio      | ● Cranberries   |              |

Insects:

- |                 |                   |                   |             |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| ● Dubia Roaches | ● Hornworms       | ● Super worms     | ● Silkworms |
| ● Butter Worms  | ● Mealworms       | ● (In moderation) | ● Wax Worms |
| ● Crickets      | ● (In moderation) | ● Earthworms      |             |

## Brumation

Brumation is a hibernation-like state that cold blooded animals go through during winter. Most Bearded Dragons will adopt this state around 10 months of age and it's completely normal. Estimating the length of brumation is difficult to predict because all BD's are different. Health, size, age, gender and geographical origin all play a role in the length of brumation. When a BD brumates, its activity levels will significantly decrease. They will begin to burrow, stay in their hide 90% of the time or find a well-hidden perch to rest on. If your BD does not have access to any hiding spots, provide multiple hides or nests. This will make brumation more comfortable for your BD. Assure your BD's enclosure has a thermal gradient or a range of temperatures from a high end to a low end. Once brumating, they will prefer the cool side of the enclosure and will bask less frequently. Appetite loss is to be expected during brumation. Offer food and water once to twice a week (Do not leave greens or fruits in enclosure for more than 24hrs). Although appetite will decrease, your BD should not experience weight loss. Weighing your BD once a week is recommended. If you notice rapid weight loss, contact your vet. Only handle your BD for its necessities, disturbing it will cause prolonged brumation periods. Although not required, shortening your BD's light cycle can be beneficial.