

Caring for Your Bearded Dragon

About: Bearded dragons are found in the wild in the rocky, semi-desert areas of Australia and Tasmania. "Bearded" refers to a flap of skin under the chin that gets distended when these creatures are disturbed. They are generally easy to handle or socialize, and tolerate handling well. Bearded dragons are diurnal, meaning they are active during the day and sleep at night. They are omnivores and consume large amounts of insects, plants, fruits and flowers. Bearded dragons can get approximately 24 inches long so please refer to the enclosure information below for appropriately sized habitats for their size.

Determining Your Bearded Dragon's Age:

Sometimes you may get a bearded dragon and not know how old he/she is. Fortunately, there are a few tricks you can use to get a general estimate of how old a bearded dragon is.

One quick way you can determine the age of a younger dragon is by measuring the bearded dragon from head to tail. Generally, if the length of the dragon represents the age (up to a certain point).

The chart below is the average size of over 50 bearded dragons during the first 12 months:

Length (Inches)	Age (Months)
3-4 in.	0-1 months
5-9 in.	2 months
8-11 in.	3 months
9-12 in.	4 months
11-16 in.	5 months
11-18 in.	6 months
13-20 in.	8 months
16-22 in.	12+ months

Determining Age by Sexual Maturity

Most bearded dragons will become sexually mature by 8-18 months of age. This is the point where you can differentiate the difference between males and females. So once you are able to distinguish a bearded dragon's gender, you can assume that he/she is 8-12 months old.

Please keep in mind that there is no way you can accurately determine a bearded dragon's age without contacting the breeder. Bearded dragons are like people, some develop faster or slower and are larger than others at different times of their life.

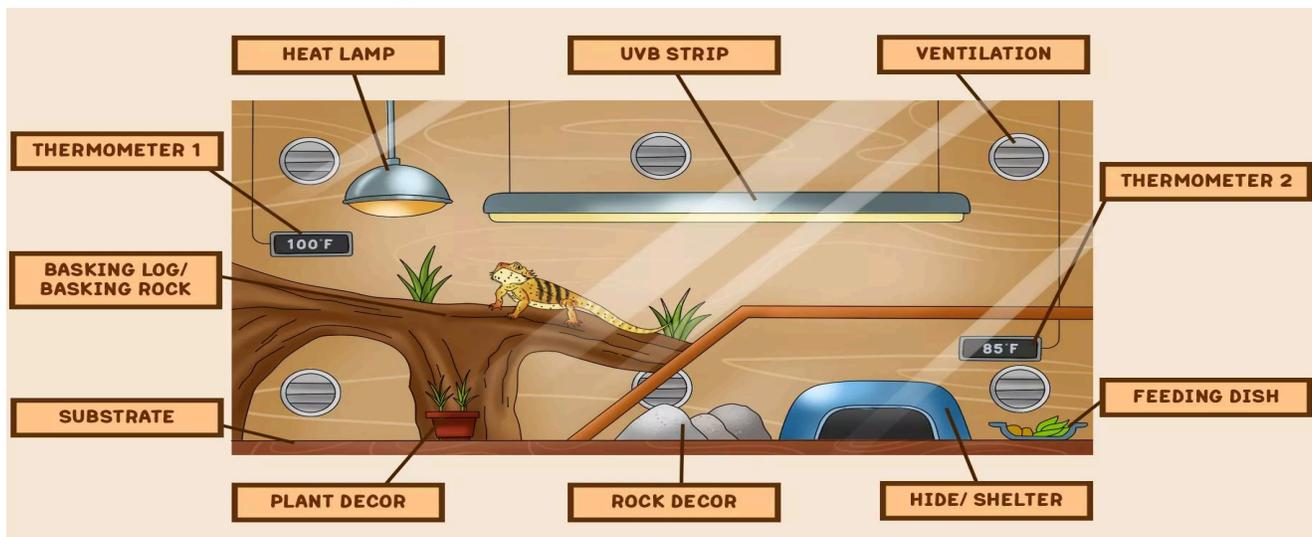
Bearded Dragon Lifespan

Bearded dragons are normally very healthy and hardy lizards. However, their lifespan depends on many factors. The chart below highlights different age ranges you can expect from your bearded dragon:

- 5-8 Years - This is the max age bearded dragons get in the wild and is generally how long a dragon will live if their owner does the basics and doesn't pay attention to their bearded dragon's diet or health.
- 8-12 Years - This is the likely lifespan of a bearded dragon that is kept healthy and is watched closely by their owner.
- 12-14 Years - Generally the max lifespan of bearded dragons that are kept in captivity.
- 14+ Years - It is very rare for bearded dragons to surpass 14 years in age, however there have been rumors of dragons living to be as old as 19 years...but it has never been officially proven.

Enclosure: Due to their quick growth, it is best to have a large, well ventilated enclosure/terrarium with a screen top. They require a generous amount of space, provide a minimum of a 20 gallon aquarium/terrarium for juveniles (**6 inches and under**) and a single adult should have an enclosure size of at least 72 inches long by 16 inches wide by 17 inches high. At minimum it should be 4 times the length and width of the lizard.

- **Substrate:** The bottom of the enclosure should be covered with something safe and clean. Since bearded dragons will eat bedding made of small particles, you should not use sand (including biodegradable calcium-based sands), wood chips, or gravel. Good choices include newspaper, paper towels, indoor/outdoor tile, or reptile carpet.
- **Lighting:** A full spectrum ultraviolet light source (UVB) is required for about 12-14 hours each day during spring and summer and 8-12 hours in the fall and winter. UV rays cannot pass through glass or plastic so avoid any covering between the bulb and the bearded dragon. UV bulbs should be replaced every 6 months (even if the light is not burned out). Most UVB bulbs do not produce much heat, so a heat lamp should also be provided for basking. Additional nighttime heat, if needed, can be provided with ceramic heat emitters (preferred), heat strip or nighttime designed bulb. Avoid red or white lights for nighttime use to provide the proper nighttime day/night cycle and sleep cycles.
- **Humidity:** Keep the humidity level between 20-40%. A hygrometer (humidity gauge) will help you to monitor humidity.
- **Temperature:** Daytime ambient temperature between 75-85°F (24-29°C). Basking spot keep at 88-100°F (31-38°C). At night, keep around 70-75°F (21-24°C). Levels can be monitored by thermometers placed at both the cool and hot ends of the enclosure.
- **Cage Furniture:** Bearded dragons are ground dwellers but will climb rocks and low branches. Provide branches to climb, rocks to bask upon (avoid heat/basking rocks), and shelter to hide in. Ideally a rock should be placed under the heat lamp and a similar item in the cool area as well. Research any plant life before adding to the enclosure to ensure safe for beardies in case of ingestion.
- **Water:** Keep a shallow bowl of fresh water available at all times for drinking. Change the water daily. Bearded dragons enjoy a shallow soak weekly in warm water and misting.
- **Maintenance:** The enclosure should be spot checked for feces daily. Remove and replace soiled or wet portions of the substrate to prevent bacterial and fungal growth. Change the substrate and disinfect the enclosure with dilute soap or dilute bleach solution on a regular basis and rinse thoroughly. Always wash your hands before and after cleaning the enclosure and accessories.



Nutrition: Bearded dragons are omnivores and consume large amounts of insects, plants, fruits, and flowers. Their diet will change as they mature. Juveniles require more protein and so they should be offered more insects (approx ~50% of their diet). Avoid fruits or give sparingly due to sugar content. See the lists below for an idea of foods to offer. Further research can be done to expand your variety.

- **Feeding Juveniles:** Appropriately sized insects should be no longer than the width of the dragon's head and should be offered twice daily. Insects can be "gut loaded" crickets, dubia roaches, mealworms, and occasionally black soldier fly larvae or waxworms (these can be offered more as treats due to high protein and calcium). Besides insects, beardies will also require a variety of leafy green vegetables. Food should be dusted with calcium/vitamin D3 supplement at least 4-5 times weekly. A multivitamin can be used once a week. Remove any remaining insects from the enclosure once they are finished. Place fresh foods in their own dish for your pet to eat through the day. Replace at least once daily.
- **Feeding Adults:** Adults should receive about 60% or so of their diet as vegetables and the remaining as insects. Insects should be offered about 2-3 times a week. Fresh vegetables/salad should be offered daily. Commercial bearded dragon food can be offered, but should not make up more than 50% of their diet (and can be moistened with water). Be sure to replace salads and any moistened foods at least once daily.

Recommended greens/vegetables: Fresh foods should be washed and chopped to an appropriate bite size portion.

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| • Collards | • Acorn Squash |
| • Dandelion greens and flowers | • Bell Peppers (any color) |
| • Endive | • Carrots |
| • Grape leaves | • Green Beans |
| • Mustard greens | • Peas |
| • Turnip greens | • Sweet Potato |
| • Green/Red leaf lettuce | • Turnips |

Treats Only / Give Occasionally: Fresh foods should be washed and chopped to an appropriate bite size portion.

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| • Apples | • Papayas |
| • Apricots | • Pears |
| • Bananas | • Tomatoes |
| • Cantaloupe | • Geranium flowers |
| • Grapes | • Pansies |
| • Oranges | • Petunias |
| | • Rose |

Safety: Remember that all pets may bite or scratch and could transmit diseases to humans. All lizards are potential carriers of infectious diseases (such as Salmonella), always wash hands before and after handling and/or cleaning the habitat to prevent potential spread of diseases. Infants and children under the age of 5, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and the infirm or elderly are at a greater risk for infection. These individuals should use caution when in contact with the pet or its habitat.

Handling: Always supervise children when they are interacting with bearded dragons. Give 3-4 days for adjustment to new surroundings and then attempt to handle for short amounts of time. Never handle a lizard by the tail – it could break off. Pick dragons up with all 4 feet supported.

Common Medical Problems: Gastrointestinal parasites (coccidian, pinworms, and flagellates) are extremely common in bearded dragons. A fecal examination should be performed on all dragons and if necessary appropriate

anti-parasitic treatment should be prescribed by a veterinarian. A veterinarian skilled in reptile medicine and surgery should be consulted if any of the following conditions are noted in your pet:

- Weight loss
- Not eating or drinking (generally appetite will be suppressed during the pre-breeding cooling period).
- Abnormal stools
- Twitching, tremors, or seizures
- Swelling of the limbs, inability to close mouth properly
- Discharge from eyes and/or mouth
- Difficulty breathing
- Distention of the abdomen (except in females that have been bred and are doing well otherwise)
- Masses or lumps on the body or limbs, wounds, cuts, or scrapes.