

Aquatic Turtles

Snappers, Soft shells, Mata-matas, etc.

CAGING: An ordinary aquarium will do as housing for turtles. The aquarium should be at least three times as long as the turtle. These turtles can be aggressive, and should be kept one per tank; if keeping more than one turtle per tank is necessary, allow at least 5 times each turtle's area (5 x length of turtle x width of turtle) for each additional turtle. The water should be deep enough to cover the turtle, but shallow enough so that the turtle can stretch its head out of the water. No dry area is necessary, unless you plan to breed your turtles. If you do plan to breed your turtles, they will require an area of dirt in which to bury the eggs.

All turtles must have natural sunlight or an artificial equivalent, such as a Vita-Lite™. They require the ultraviolet rays such sources produce in order to metabolize vitamins. The light should be hung no more than 12 inches above the dry platform, with no glass or plastic between the light and the tank. Ordinary glass and plastic block the ultraviolet light. The light should be on at least 2 hours each day.

WATER: These turtles do not require a separate water dish; they will drink from the tank. Therefore, the water must be kept clean. If you choose to feed them in their home tanks, you will need a filter system. Get one at least twice as large as would be needed for a tank of fish the same size as your turtle tank. Even so, you will have to manually change the water, approximately once a week. If the water is not filtered, you will need to change it every other day.

TEMPERATURE: These turtles require moderate temperatures. The water should be heated to 72 to 82 degrees F by a protected aquarium heater. Another option is to hang a 60 or 75 watt spot light above one end of the tank. The water temperature can be regulated by varying the wattage of the bulb and its distance above the water. If your turtle is inactive, it's too cold.

FOOD: Some aquatic turtles are omnivorous, and will enjoy small amounts of vegetable foods as well as meat. Their main food source is fish, preferably live, and definitely whole. Many enjoy worms, snails (whole, including the shell), small frogs, and baby mice. They may also take floating food pellets formulated specifically for turtles. The pellets are both convenient and a balanced diet. The pellets, worms, and snails are particularly good for growing, young turtles, as they are high in calcium. These turtles must be fed in the water; they will not eat on land.

Many people find it easier to feed their turtles in a separate tank, leaving them there long enough to allow the turtles to defecate. This makes it much easier to keep the turtle's home clean.

HEALTH: Cages must be kept clean. Anti-bacterial cleaning solutions are recommended. One ounce of bleach in ten ounces of water is one such solution. Rinse the cage thoroughly with clean water after using any solution. Don't use Lysol, Lestoil or other such oil-based cleaners; they are deadly to reptiles.

HANDLING: Be careful when handling these turtles. They are fast and have long necks. Aquatic turtles generally don't enjoy being handled. Most will bite; sometimes with serious results. In any case, it is not good to handle them too often, as the stress can lead to the turtle becoming ill. Be careful not to drop them; a cracked shell can cause deadly infections. Always wash your hands after handling your turtle, before touching anything else (especially food or your face). This will prevent any chance of your becoming ill due to bacteria carried by the turtle.

This Care Sheet was originally written by New England Herpetological Society. It can be found at www.neherp.com or www.AnimalCityInc.com

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