



Spiny-tailed Lizard Care (Uromastyx)

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General Information

Native Habitat: Africa and Asia

Scientific Name: *Uromastyx sp.*

Lifespan: 15-25 years

Adult Length: varies with species, 10-18" on average

Housing

Juvenile Uromastyx can be started in a 20 gallon tank. Adults should be kept in a 3' to 6' x 2' space depending on the animal's size, with bigger enclosures preferred. Some species of Uromastyx such as the Egyptian variety can become very large and will require much more space than smaller species. They are ground dwelling lizards so floor space is preferred over height. Enclosure should be easy to clean, escape proof and able to withstand heat. Uromastyx are best kept solitary to prevent injuries and breeding.

Particulate substrate such as orchid bark, sand and compressed fiber is not recommended as it can lead to gastrointestinal impaction if your Uromastyx eats it. I recommend repti-carpet, paper towel, butcher paper, tile, linoleum or newspaper. A portion of the enclosure should be an area where your Uromastyx can dig. A box that is easy for your lizard to get into and out of should be filled with top soil and kept slightly moistened. Be sure the soil has no fertilizer or additives. The box should be at least twice the length of your lizard in both length and width, and should be at least 4-6" in depth. The soil should be checked frequently for mold and feces. It should be changed about every 1-2 weeks.

A hide should be provided that is large enough for your Uromastyx to easily get into and out of. One can be placed on both the warm and cool side of the tank. Be sure all decorations are secure so that nothing will fall over as your lizard moves through the tank. Any climbing surfaces should be low to the ground in the event your lizard decides to jump off of them. The basking site should have a hide or climbing surface that is on an incline so that your Uromastyx can have a gradient of both heat and UVB exposure.

Lighting

Spiny-tailed lizards require a high output of UVB light, as well as a basking area that reaches 105-115 degrees Fahrenheit. For this reason they do well with mercury vapor bulbs. These bulbs need to be changed yearly as the UVB levels degrade even if the bulb is still bright. Be sure to closely check the temperatures before putting your lizard in the enclosure with an infrared temperature gun or a temperature gauge with a probe that can be placed directly on the basking site. A thermostat is recommended to ensure any heating elements used are staying at appropriate temperatures.

Their temperature gradient should be between 80-95 degrees Fahrenheit in their enclosure during the day, and can drop to 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit at night. A night bulb may be required if the temperature drops below this.

If a non-mercury vapor bulb is used, you will need to provide both a source of heat as well as a source of UVB. Heating should always be provided as a lamp/dome fixture. UVB options include compact coiled bulbs and linear fluorescent bulbs. Most UVB sources need to be changed every 6 months, even if the light is still working. The UVB bulb should be placed closest to where the lizard spends most of its time, and should not be put behind glass or plastic. The lizard should be able to sit within 6-12" of the UVB source and should have an inclined surface to provide a gradient of exposure.

Water

Fresh water should be provided at all times for your lizard. Even if they are not seen drinking, it should always be offered. A shallow dish of water can be provided to allow the lizard to soak. Uromastyx can be maintained at a humidity of 15-30%. A humidity box can be provided to assist with shedding. These lizards do not do well with excess moisture so be sure to monitor the humidity in the enclosure with a hygrometer that has a probe attached.

Diet

Spiny-tailed lizards are herbivores and should be provided with a daily salad. Dark leafy greens such as collard greens, turnip greens, dandelion greens, endive, mustard greens can be offered daily. Avoid spinach as it binds to calcium and renders it unusable for your lizard. You may also offer a small amount of vegetables and legumes such as squash, cucumber, sweet potato, bell pepper, lentils and millet. You can spray the greens with water to assist with hydration of your Uromastyx.

Some spiny-tailed lizards will eat herbivore formulated diets such as tortoise or iguana food. If offered, be sure to offer a high quality diet such as the Mazuri brand tortoise pellets. These

formulated diets can be offered a couple times a week and the majority of the diet should be leafy greens.

Calcium powder that contains no phosphorous should be used to dust the food 1-2 times weekly. A multivitamin containing Vitamin A such as Nekton-Rep should be used to dust the food 1-2 times monthly.

Handling

Uromastyx are typically easy to train to handling when young. Start handling your lizard a week or two after acquiring it so that it has a chance to get used to its new home. Always handle your lizard close to the ground in the event they decide to run out of your hands. They feel most comfortable when all four limbs have a surface to grasp onto. You may bring your Uromastyx outside for some time in the sun but only with direct supervision.

Common Health Issues

- Dysecdysis (Abnormal/incomplete shedding): This occurs in reptiles due to improper husbandry. Often retained shed will be located around the feet and toes, which can cause constriction at those areas and lead to necrosis. To prevent this from happening it is important to be sure there is appropriate humidity and temperature in the animal's environment. You may soak your lizard once daily in shallow, tepid water for 10-15 minutes during shedding.
- Gastrointestinal Impaction: Impaction is the clogging of the GI tract with material so that it cannot progress normally through the GI tract. This can cause necrosis of the intestinal walls if not surgically addressed in a timely fashion. Reptiles can be prone to impaction if they are kept on a particulate substrate such as sand, gravel or fiber. Impaction can also happen with inappropriately large food items or feeding highly chitinous insects in large numbers. This will cause your pet to become lethargic, inappetent, and they will not be defecating. Radiographs are often used to check for impacted material. Sometimes barium is needed to evaluate exactly where the blockage is occurring. If you suspect your animal may be impacted, they should be evaluated by a veterinarian immediately.
- Intestinal parasites: Many of the feeder insects that reptiles carry can harbor intestinal parasites that may be transmitted to your reptile. They can also obtain gastrointestinal parasites by contacting other reptiles. A small number of these parasites may normally inhabit your reptile's gastrointestinal tract without any problems. However with overgrowth of these parasites they can cause a problem. They can cause malabsorption of nutrients, inappetence,

lethargy and abnormal stool production. A few of the common parasites encountered include pinworms, coccidia, and flagellated protozoa. A fecal exam is recommended yearly for your reptile to screen for any abnormal amounts of GI parasites.

- Secondary Nutritional Hyperparathyroidism: This disease process is caused by improper husbandry with some possibilities including lack of calcium or vitamin D3 in the diet, excess phosphorous in the diet and absence of a UVB light source. A majority of reptiles need calcium added to their diet in the form of a Calcium powder (no phosphorous) used to dust the insects a few times weekly. In order to process this calcium, a UVB light source is required. When there is an imbalance in the calcium and phosphorous, the body increases the breakdown of calcium stores from the animal's bones in order to maintain appropriate calcium levels. In an animal this can cause significant deformation of the skeleton including bowing of the legs, shortening of the snout, and stunting of growth. The bones become fragile and are prone to fractures. As calcium is needed for many bodily functions, such as muscle contraction, the animal may become weak, lethargic, and anorexic when the body can no longer maintain its calcium levels. This is a process that can typically be remedied with improvement in husbandry and long term calcium supplementation under veterinary supervision. In severe cases, hospitalization may be required to give the animal the best chance at recovery.