a care guide for your

Bearded Dragon (Pogona vitticeps)

seattle animal shelter

Congratulations on adopting a dragon ... a bearded dragon! Here is what you need to know and how to expect to care for your fun, new family member.

Behavior and socialization

Bearded dragons, or "beardies," are diurnal, which means that, like most of us, they are up during the day and asleep at night. They tend to be very docile and easy to handle, which makes them fun and personable pets. They are active, inquisitive and hardy and enjoy lounging with and/or on their people. If you happen to acquire a beardie who has not been handled much, move slow. Try interacting with him in his terrarium, and, as he gets used to being touched and held for short periods of time, you can increase the duration that you have your scaly friend out with you.

Diet

Make sure to provide your beardie access to water at all times via a small, shallow water dish.

Beardies are omnivores, like people. This means they can consume plant and animal products. Pet dragons will need to feast on insects, veggies and fruit. They should receive a daily salad composed of greens (e.g., dandelion, mustard and collard greens; endives; bok choy; watercress) and veggies (e.g., bell peppers, squashes, carrots, green beans). Their salads should be chopped, diced and/or shredded into small enough pieces that they are able to eat. Their salads should be about as big as their torsos. Fruits should be seen as a daily treat and should not compose more than 10 percent of their daily diets. Fruits that they can eat include berries and melons.

The Basics

LIFESPAN
6 to 10 years

DIET
greens (one salad per day) and insects

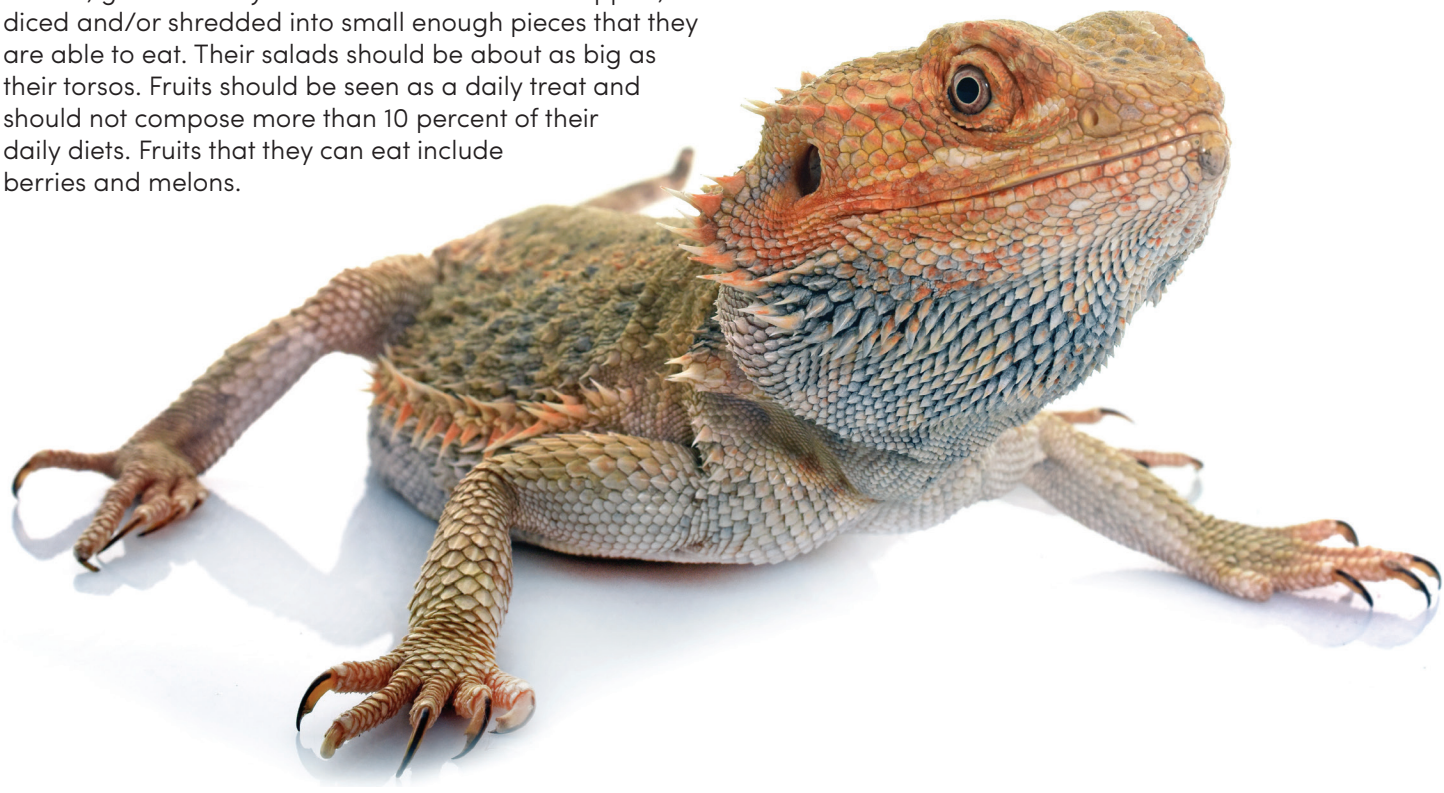
HABITAT
glass terrarium with large surface area

CLIMATE
95°F-110°F

Beardies should also be offered as many insects daily as what they can eat in a 10- to 15-minute period. Insects safe for bearded dragons to consume include crickets, superworms, redworms, earthworms, locusts and Dubia roaches. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded prior to feeding them to your hungry friend. Gut loading means to feed the insects a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D3. This process should occur about 24 hours prior to feeding the insects to your dragon.

Lifespan

Bearded dragons typically live six to 10 years.



Habitat

Bearded dragons should be housed in glass terrariums that include ventilated lids from which they cannot escape. A ventilated lid will allow for proper air circulation and will also keep the humidity low, which is essential since bearded dragons originate from an arid environment. Bearded dragons are not big climbers, so look for an aquarium that has a large surface area but is not very tall. An adult should be in at least a 50-gallon terrarium.

Avoid sand, gravel, wood chips and other substrates on the floor of their habitat that they could accidentally ingest. Appropriate substrates include newspaper, butcher paper, paper towels and reptile carpet.

Heating and lighting

Beardies originate from the semiarid dessert in Australia, so they are built for heat. Provide a basking bulb (incandescent or ceramic) that results in a temperature between 95 degrees F and 110 degrees F. The cooler parts of the habitat can be around 85 degrees F. Do not let the nighttime temperature drop below 75 degrees F. Avoid heat rocks and under-tank heat sources that can result in nasty thermal burns.

Your bearded dragon should be on a 12-hour light and 12-hour dark schedule. During the 12 hours of daylight, natural sunlight is preferred. If this is not feasible, use a UVA/UVB bulb. Natural sunlight and/or UVA/UVB light is essential to calcium and vitamin D intake. A deficiency of these can lead to metabolic bone disease. During the night, you can use infrared or ceramic bulbs to provide your beardie with heat but no light.

Supplies needed

- ☐ Fresh greens, veggies and fruit
- ☐ Feeder insects (including a holding habitat and gut feed)
- ☐ Shallow water dish
- ☐ Shallow food dish
- ☐ Reptile hide
- ☐ Reptile temperature and humidity gauge
- ☐ Reptile thermometer
- ☐ Habitat (minimum 50-gallon terrarium for an adult beardie)
- ☐ Substrate (reptile carpet, paper towels, newspaper or butcher paper)
- ☐ Heat bulbs (ceramic and/or infrared)
- ☐ Day bulb (UVA/UVB bulb)

References

- Kamaka Exotic Animal Veterinary Services (www.KamakaExoticVet.com)
- Bird & Exotic Clinic of Seattle (www.BirdAndExotic.com)
- Reptiles Magazine (www.ReptilesMagazine.com)
- The Bearded Dragon (www.TheBeardedDragon.org)

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