



# Lone Mountain

••• ANIMAL HOSPITAL •••



## Introduction to Desert Tortoises

### Housing

May be housed outdoors in large grassy enclosures with adequate shelter and the ability to burrow in times of extreme temperature

Enclosures adequate to prevent attacks from predators

Native plants, a clean water source, and occasional supplementation of diet with leafy greens will help to provide a more nutritionally balanced diet

Younger tortoises are often housed inside due to the increased possibility of predation because of small size.

Desert tortoises need ample space if housed inside; minimal sized enclosures for juveniles less than 6in is 36in x 18in x 18in

Ensure UVB lighting for 12-16 hrs per day when housing juveniles inside.

*Excerpts from the Arizona Fish and Game Department, Edited by Evelyn Crawford, Veterinary Assistant, South Wilton Veterinary Group, reviewed by Jacqueline Saint-Onge, DVM, South Wilton Veterinary Group and Darius Starks, DVM Lone Mountain Animal Hospital*

### Distribution

Desert Tortoises (*Xerobates agassizi*) are native to the harsh dry climate of the Southwestern US and northern Mexico, mainly the Sonoran and Mojave deserts

Protected species with several local laws that must be considered before acquiring

### Sexing

Sexing semi adult and adult tortoises is very easy; males typically are larger females and have a larger tails. Males have concave plastron (bottom shell) and sexually mature males sport very prominent 'gular horns,' or elongated scutes on the plastron, just underneath the neck

During the breeding season, males have two 'chin glands' that sometimes produce a thick secretion

### Size

10-16in in length; large males can weigh up to 50 lb, average weight is around 30lb for an adult desert tortoise

### Diet

Correctly feeding your desert tortoise can be challenging

Require a high fiber, low-moderate protein, and low fat diet

Majority of the diet should consist of grasses and grass hays, supplemented with dark leafy greens

Avoid feeding excessive fruits and roots

Also may feed commercially available diets, such as Mega Diet RF

Avoid feeding diets too rich in nutrients as it can cause pyramiding of the shell

Provide calcium, vitamin, and mineral supplementation twice a week for juveniles and every two weeks for adults

### Temperature

Adapted to extremes of environment and temperature, and do well housed outside in Las Vegas, provided that are either allowed to burrow once temperatures begin to drop below 50-60° F

Outdoor tortoises appreciate a basking area around 100-105° F, with an ambient air temperature around 80-85° F.

### Lighting

Require access to ultraviolet B lighting (UVB lighting) for 12 – 16 hours per day

If housed outside, then natural sunlight will meet these needs

Change UVB bulbs every 6 months to ensure proper UVB ray emissions for tortoises housed indoors

### Humidity

Humidity levels not higher than 30% are ideal; higher levels may predispose to respiratory issues

Although adapted to the scarcity of water of arid environments, all tortoises benefit from regular weekly soakings in warm shallow water and many enjoy a long drink

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