

BEARDED DRAGONS INFO SHEET

Bearded dragons are a group of lizards from Australia in the genus *Pogona*. The central bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) is the most widely reared species in captivity, followed by the smaller western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minor*).

Bearded dragons are spectacular lizards. They are so-named because of their ruff of spike-like scales which covers the underside of their neck and chin area, resembling a human beard. When threatened, bearded dragons flatten their bodies and puff out their spiny beards to appear as large as possible.

The colouration of bearded dragons varies widely; particular individuals may be brown, red, orange, yellow or white, and all bearded dragons can darken or lighten their colour to regulate temperature as well.

Due to their docile nature, bearded dragons are among the most popular of all pet reptiles. If cared for correctly, they may live for over a decade. If handled frequently and carefully, they also become very tame and often appear to enjoy being handled.

Image 1: A central bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*);

Image 2: The dragon's "beard" consists of a ruff of spike-like scales;

Image 3: A central bearded dragon stalking a young locust;

Image 4: A pair of central bearded dragons.



How to keep a Bearded Dragon

The following is a brief summary and does not include all of the information required to look after these exquisite creatures. If you are interested in keeping bearded dragons, please refer to the bearded dragons chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Bearded dragons are easy to keep and make wonderful pets. Since adult bearded dragons grow up to 60 cm long, a large enclosure is required. Select a reptile vivarium or an aquarium-style glass tank with a lid that is at least 120 cm long, 60 cm wide and 60 cm tall. Wooden reptile vivariums offer the advantage of better insulation and lower heating costs. Young bearded dragons can be kept in smaller enclosures temporarily. Since larger bearded dragons may show aggression to smaller ones, each animal should be housed separately.

Add sheets of newspaper, paper towels or reptile turf (available at your local pet store) as a floor covering in the enclosure. Do not use sand, wood chippings, wood shavings, or vermiculite as bearded dragons may eat such loose substrate, sometimes fatally, although specialist reptile sand can be used.

Add pieces of sterilised driftwood, cork bark, sticks and branches to give your bearded dragon furniture to climb on. Consider adding a reptile shelter or a few plants as well.

Bearded dragons originate from deserts and tropical grasslands of Australia. They therefore require temperatures of 25–31 °C during the day and slightly less at night. Heating can easily be achieved by using a dedicated heat pad. Ensure that the pad covers no more than one third of the tank and that it is thermostatically controlled. Install a heat lamp as well to provide a basking area. Make sure that there is an unheated section of the tank to allow your bearded dragon to cool off when it needs to.

A reptile-grade UVB lamp is also essential. Bearded dragons require exposure to ultraviolet light in order to produce vitamin D, with 12 to 14 hours of exposure required daily. The UVB lamp light source should be positioned 30 cm above wherever the bearded dragon spends most of its time (such as its basking site).

Provide a bowl of chlorine-free drinking water and change it daily. Feed your bearded dragon live food (crickets, small locusts or mealworms from pet shops work best). Prey should be approximately the same size as the distance between your bearded dragon's eyes, and up to 20 insects may be eaten each day, though usually fewer. Young bearded dragons require a diet mainly of live prey, but adults increasingly require fruit and vegetables as well. Provide a mixture of dandelion leaves, cabbage, watercress, chopped carrots, spinach and other greens, as well as slices of bell peppers, green beans, apples, bananas, mangoes and peaches. Gently handle your bearded dragon from a young age and your pet will become increasingly tame.

For more information, see the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Image 5: A central bearded dragon exhibiting wild-type colouration;

Image 6: An orange central bearded dragon variant;

Image 7: A yellow central bearded dragon variant.



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**Buy the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book
to discover the biology, ecology, diversity
and how to keep bearded dragons.**

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