

# IGUANAS INFO SHEET

Over 35 species of iguanas occur across the Americas and the Caribbean in a wide spectrum of colours, shapes and sizes, with many species growing to lengths of 1.5 m or more.

Iguanas are among the world's most spectacular reptiles but they are **not recommended** as beginner-level pets. Many iguana species have demanding requirements in captivity, and large specimens can become aggressive, or even dangerous to handle as a result of their powerful jaws, sharp claws and whip-like tails.

The majority of iguanas in captivity are green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*). So called for their vivid green colouration, not all green iguanas are actually green. Mature males may turn bright orange, red or brown when courting females.

Green iguanas have excellent eyesight, and communicate visually via "head bobbing" displays which show off their dewlaps (a flap of skin that hangs from the neck that acts like a flag as the iguana nods its head).

In addition to their two regular eyes, many species of iguanas also have a "parietal eye" (also called a "third eye") on the top of their heads. This is a primitive light-sensing organ that detects changes in light and dark, and warns against predators stalking from above. if you cover the parietal eye, captive iguanas often fall asleep, thinking that it is night time.

Image 1: A portrait of a green iguana, *Iguana iguana*;  
Image 2: A sub-mature green iguana.



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# How to keep an Iguana

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 iguanas, please refer to the page iguana chapter in the *Weird and Wonderful Pets* book.

Before obtaining an iguana, please think very carefully as to whether you can fully cater for the needs of a captive adult. In some locations (such as Hawaii), green iguanas are considered exotic pets and ownership is prohibited to prevent accidental introduction into the wild.

Green iguanas grow up to 180 cm long (including their tails). A very large enclosure is required to house an adult animal. Select a reptile vivarium that is at least 240 cm long, 90 cm wide and 100 cm tall. Young iguanas can be kept in smaller enclosures temporarily. Each animal should be housed separately.

Add sheets of newspaper, paper towels or reptile turf (available at pet stores) as a floor covering in the enclosure. Do not use sand, wood chippings, shavings, or vermiculite as iguanas may eat such loose substrate, sometimes fatally.

Add pieces of sterilised driftwood, cork bark, sticks and branches to give your iguana furniture to climb on. Consider a few plants as well.

Green Iguanas require temperatures of 24–32 °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 iguana to cool off when it needs to.

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

Provide a bowl of chlorine-free drinking water and change it daily. Green iguanas are herbivores and should be fed fresh leafy vegetables in captivity, such as dandelion leaves, broccoli, bok choy, green beans, and squash, collard greens or kale. Avoid iceberg lettuce, which has little nutritional value.

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

Image 3: An adult green iguana;

Image 4: An adult male green iguana posing with mating colours.



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

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