Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
www.AuroraAnimalHospital.com (303)680-7305

Bearded Dragon (Pogona vitticeps) Care

Compiled by Dr. Dayna Willems

Brief Description
Native to the arid regions of Australia, bearded dragons are popular pets in captivity due to their docile nature and fairly basic care requirements compared to other reptiles. Adults can get up to two feet in length. There are several color morphs available like citrus, tangerine, and reds, and then several based on their scale texture as well.

Lifespan
With good care the average lifespan is about 8-10 years.

Sexing
Determining the gender of your bearded dragon can be difficult, especially as juveniles. Beard color is not a reliable indicator. Males will head bob to attract a female but some females will also head bob as a show of dominance. If you look at the underside of the tail just past the vent males should have two bulges side by side where the hemipenes (reproductive organs) sit in the base of the tail. Females will not have this. If your beardie's hemipenes briefly come out of the body while defecating then it is definitely male. Males also tend to have larger femoral pores as adults that can fill with waxy substance (normal).

Caging
- Juveniles: At least 20 gallon tank.
- Adults: At least 40 gallon tank.
- One bearded dragon per cage.

Substrate
- Newspaper, artificial turf like reptile carpet, flat stones or no floor covering are best.
- AVOID sand (especially calcium sand) and bark/mulch should - your dragon might consume sand or fine-particle products on the cage floor, and this could lead to intestinal impaction.
- A flat rock under the basking light will warm evenly and provide a good basking spot.

Lighting and Temperature
Reptiles need a warm place to bask (**100-105 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**80-85 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 60 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

Bearded dragons MUST have UVB light to survive and a lack of UVB will lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, severe deformation, and death. A commercially available UVB bulb is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic so having the cage near a window does not work. Look for UVB listed specifically on retail packaging before buying.

- After about 6 months of use most bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

Humidity
Humidity in the tank should be 30-50% and should be monitored by a hygrometer. Inadequate humidity will affect your reptile's ability to shed its skin properly and can cause serious problems.

Water
A shallow water dish with fresh water must be available at all times. It should also be stable, so it cannot be spilled, and it should be easy to climb in and out of from all sides. The dishes used under potted plants are excellent for water dishes and inexpensive. Vitamin drops should not be added to the water.

Food
Bearded dragons eat a combination of live insects and vegetables every day when young, and every other day as adults. Younger bearded dragons will eat a higher ratio of insects than adult beardies. The best insects to use are crickets or dubia roaches which can be gutloaded (see below). Other live insects that can be included in your bearded dragon's diet are superworms, hornworms, and silkworms. Wax worms and mealworms should only be given as a treat because of the high fat content and low digestibility. The general rule is to feed bearded dragons crickets no larger than the distance between their eyes.

Gutloading
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and/or dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

Staple Ingredients (Highest in calcium and other nutrients)					
Collard Greens	Turnip Greens	Mustard Greens	Escarole	Endive	Dandelion

Good Ingredients (Use as supplements to staples listed above)					
Sweet Potato	Papaya	Kale	Butternut Squash	Berries	Mango
Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow					

Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens)
Idaho potatoes, cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, canned or dried insects, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards). While convenient, some commercially available gutloads (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition.

Supplementation
A powdered calcium supplement (without phosphorus) should be used to lightly coat the crickets 3-4 times weekly until 2 years of age and then 1-2 times weekly after that. A multivitamin can be used less frequently (once or twice a month) if desired but with good nutrition this is not always necessary.

Other good sources of information on Bearded Dragon Care:
http://www.reptilechannel.com/care-sheets/bearded-dragon-lizard.aspx
http://www.thebeardeddragon.org/
http://www.beautifuldragons.com/Nutrition.html
http://southernbeardies.com/Care_Sheet.html