



Sydney Exotics & Rabbit Vets

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BLUE-TONGUED LIZARD CARE

There are many species of Blue-tongued lizards native to Australia. Some of the main species kept in captivity include the **Eastern Blue-tongue** *Tiliqua scincoides*, **Blotched Blue-tongue** *Tiliqua nigrolutea*, and the **Shingleback lizard** *Tiliqua rugosa*. They are gentle and docile creatures. Blue-tongues can grow to around 45-55cm in length (including tail) & live to around 12-15 years. Below outlines some 'basic' requirements for keeping Blue-tongued lizards as pets.

*Please note: All Australian lizards are **protected species** in Australia. Seek individual state & territory requirements for legalities on keeping lizards as pets.*

Housing

- Blue-tongues can be housed indoors. They require suitable artificial heat & light sources as outlined below
- Suitable enclosures include ventilated glass tanks, plastic tubs or glass fronted cabinets at least 1m long x 0.5m wide
- Enclosure set-up depends on the age/size & numbers of lizards kept. Provide them with hide-boxes
- Substrates** (enclosure floor covering) are most simply & hygienically provided by means of newspaper. Artificial grass can also make a good, easy to clean substrate option
- Enclosures should be **disinfected** at least once weekly (use household bleach diluted 1:10 with water & rinse well afterwards) & 'spot' cleaned as necessary
- Blue-tongues can be housed in groups, but beware of fighting that may occur
- A shallow water bowl should be present at all times. Make sure the Blue-tongue can't drown in it.
- Shinglebacks** come from dry areas & prefer lower humidity, they should only be offered water one day per week
- Heating.** Provide them with a 'temperature gradient' in their enclosure. This means they need a 'hot' end & a 'cool' end. The temperatures must be monitored with thermometers at both of these ends
- The **hot/basking area** end can be heated with a thermostatically controlled ceramic/reflector globe to create a basking temp of 30-35C. At the **cool end**, aim for 24-28C. (nb; different species require different temperatures)
- Overnight temperatures should not fall below 17-18C. The use of heat mats or weaker ceramic heat lamps may be required to achieve this 'night heat'. Do not use heat rocks, as serious burns to the lizard could result.
- Lighting.** Blue-tongues should be provided with **UVB light** supplementation
- Correct lighting may also stimulate natural foraging and feeding behaviours in some species
- Blue-tongues rely on UVB light rays to be able to adequately produce **Vitamin D3** in their skin. Vitamin D3 is essential for proper calcium metabolism in lizards
- UVB light can be provided by artificial 'UV-lights', however, there is **NO** substitute for **natural unfiltered sunlight**
- Blue-tongues should be placed in **sunlight** for 20-30minute periods at least 1-2 times a week. When doing this ensure the lizard is enclosed safely in an escape/predator proof cage. The sunlight should not pass through any glass or plastic as these will filter out UVB rays. Make certain that the lizard has access to shade & cannot overheat
- Most artificial UV sources designed for reptiles need to be placed at a minimum length from the reptile obtaining the light. Furthermore, the effective UVB emission lifespan of these lights is usually in the vicinity of 3-6 months, so they will need to be **replaced at least every 6 months**
- Recommended day and night cycles for most Blue-tongue species is 12 hrs light and 12 hrs dark

Handling

- Most Blue-tongues can become very used to being handled. Over handling though may be stressful
- Support the whole body of the lizard from underneath. Particularly the fore & hind limbs. Avoid squeezing the lizard

Feeding

- Blue-tongues are **omnivorous**. Feed them around equal quantities of fruits/vegies & animal foods
- Salad greens/vegies/fruits** offered can include Chinese greens, endive, dandelions, mustard greens, sweet potato, squash, carrots, beans & peas, apple, pear, melons, figs, pitted stone fruits, berries & occasional banana
- Animal foods** can include snails, insects(crickets, roaches, moths, beetles etc), boiled egg, occasional dog food
- Food items can be supplemented with weekly Calcium/vitamin/mineral powder
- Feed juveniles 1-2x a day & adults 2-3 times a week
- Offer them a few pieces no bigger than 1/3 the width of their heads

Veterinary & Health Notes

- Have any new lizard examined by a reptile vet. **Parasite** checks and general blood screens can be performed
- It is essential that you **quarantine** any newly acquired reptile. Don't risk introducing disease or parasites. Speak to your reptile vet for details on sound quarantine procedures
- It is recommended that you have your reptiles vet-checked annually. Especially if you intend to breed them
- Always wash your hands after handling** any reptile & between handling of different reptiles
- It is a good idea to regularly **weigh** & record the body weight of your Blue-tongues
- Blue-tongues can be transported individually in tied cotton bags. Ensure that they can't escape or overheat
- Pet health insurance is more widely available nowadays and is worth considering for your pet reptile