

Northern Blue Tongue Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides intermedia*)

Difficulty: Intermediate

Northern blue tongue skinks are 18-24" long lizards with a long, heavyset body, small but strong limbs, and a triangular head. They have a banded pattern from their back to the tip of their tail, with a pale belly and yellow or orange splotches along the sides.

These lizards are primarily found in the northern parts of Australia's Queensland, Northern Territory, and Western Australia territories. They inhabit forest, woodland, and grassland habitats, and can sometimes be found in urban and suburban gardens and parks. Blue tongue skinks are very terrestrial and generally poor climbers or swimmers.

Blue tongue skinks are some of the most popular pet lizards in the United States. Northerns generally have an easygoing, curious temperament which quickly makes them a favorite. They live an average of 15-20 years in captivity with good care, although they can live longer.

Shopping List

- 48"x24"x24" reptile enclosure (preferably front-opening)
- Dual dome heat lamp with ceramic sockets
- 100w PAR38 halogen flood bulb, x2
- Large piece of flagstone or slate tile, for basking
- Plug-in lamp dimmer, x2
- Digital thermometer/hygrometer device with probes
- Infrared thermometer ("temperature gun")
- 22" T5 HO desert UVB bulb (Arcadia or Zoo Med brand)
- 24" T5 HO light fixture with reflector
- Surge protector with digital timer
- 4-6" of naturalistic substrate
- Large reptile hideout/cave, x2
- Environmental enrichment items (logs, sturdy plants, rocks, etc.)
- Food and water dishes
- Calcium powder supplement (low or no D3)
- Multivitamin powder supplement

Housing

Leading modern blue tongue skink husbandry experts recommend keeping blue tongue skinks in no smaller than a 120 gallon (48"L x 24"W x 24"H) enclosure, preferably larger. The enclosure should be front-opening for easy access, and should have good ventilation.

Can multiple Northern blue tongue skinks be housed together?

Northern blue tongue skinks are known to be territorial, which means that keeping multiple blueys in the same enclosure can lead to fighting and serious (sometimes even fatal) injuries. So it's best to keep only one blue tongue skink per enclosure.

Lighting & UVB

Blue tongue skinks are *diurnal*, which means that they are more active during the day. This also means that they are stimulated by the presence of bright white light in their environment, and they require high-quality UVB lighting for survival.

UVB Lighting

UVB lighting can be tricky, because in order to get the right strength of UVB (UV Index, or UVI), distance and potential mesh obstruction must be considered. To provide appropriate UVB in a single 48" x 24" x 24" blue tongue skink enclosure, you will need a 22" T5 HO Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 or Arcadia D3+ Desert 12% bulb, placed on the warm side of the enclosure.

The basking area should be placed as follows:

- UVB mounted over mesh: basking area 7-11" below UVB lamp
- UVB mounted under mesh: basking area 12-18" below UVB lamp

(These recommendations are approximations based on available data. For best results, use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a UVI of 3.0-4.0 in the basking area.)

Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Blue tongue skinks, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. Blue tongue skinks warm up by basking under the sun in the wild. In captivity, they do best with a halogen heat lamp.

- **Basking surface temperature:** 105-115°F (40-46°C)
- **Cool zone temperature:** 70-80°F (21-27°C)

Generally speaking, 100w PAR38 halogen flood bulbs should be plenty to achieve those basking temperatures in a 24" tall enclosure. However, if you notice that they're getting too hot, dial it down with a plug-in lamp dimmer. If your basking area is too cool, you need higher wattage bulbs.

To measure the basking surface temperature, use an infrared thermometer (a.k.a. temperature gun). To passively track basking temperature, use a digital probe thermometer, with the probe placed on the basking surface under the heat source. The Etekcity 774 is a good infrared thermometer, and most reptile-brand digital probe thermometers function well.

Humidity

Northern blue tongue skinks should have an **average ambient humidity of 40-60%**, as measured by a digital probe hygrometer with the probe placed on the ground on the cool side of the enclosure. Humidity levels that are consistently higher or lower than this range can make your pet unwell.

Substrate

Blue tongue skinks are healthiest and happiest when they are housed on a substrate (a.k.a. “bedding”) that imitates the conditions of their natural habitat. In northern Australia, that habitat includes soil that is very sandy and/or stony. So the substrate in your Northern blue tongue skink’s enclosure should be sand-rich soil, packed 4-6” deep.

Jurassic Natural Australian Desert Dragon Habitat, The Bio Dude Terra Sahara, Lugarti Natural Reptile Bedding are the closest commercially-available substrates to a Northern blue tongue skink’s habitat. Alternatively, you can use a DIY mix of 60% organic, additive-free topsoil and 40% play sand.

Sick or wounded blue tongue skinks should not be kept on loose substrate. Instead, use paper towels until they have recovered.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. Substrate should be completely replaced once every 4-6 months, depending on your needs.

Décor

Decorations play an important role in your blue tongue skink’s enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your skink’s natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nice! Here are some ideas:

- Additional hideouts/caves
- Cork logs
- Cork flats
- Sturdy branches
- Sturdy live or artificial plants

Food

Blue tongue skinks are *omnivores*, which means that they need both animal- and plant-based foods to get the nutrition that their bodies need. How often and how much they need to eat depends on age:

- Feed babies (up to 3 months) daily.
- Feed juveniles (3-8 months) 3 times weekly.
- Feed subadults and adults (8+ months) 1-2 times weekly.

Blue tongue skinks 12 months and younger should receive high-protein foods as 70-80% of their diet. After this point, high-protein foods should only make up 50-60% of their diet. The rest of a blue tongue skink’s diet should come from leafy greens and other vegetables, with fruit offered as a treat.

The key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for your pet blue tongue skink is VARIETY. Provide as varied of a diet as you possibly can, and you will be rewarded with a healthier pet that always looks forward to mealtime.

High-protein food: high-quality dog or cat food (no fish flavors), chicken hearts, chicken gizzards, eggs, mice, dubia roaches, grasshoppers, locusts, snails, hornworms, silkworms, earthworms

Safe vegetables: collard greens, cactus pads, spring mix, arugula, kale, pea shoots, alfalfa, bok choy, carrot greens, spinach, dandelion greens/flowers, hibiscus leaves/flowers

Fruit is high in sugar and should only be offered as an occasional treat. Options include berries, figs, apples, prickly pear, papaya, and mango.

Supplements

To ensure that your blue tongue skink is getting all of the vitamins and minerals that they need, you will need a calcium powder and a multivitamin powder — or a good all-in-one.

There are many options, but you can't go wrong with Arcadia Earthpro A or Repashy Calcium Plus LoD, which are both solid all-in-one reptile supplements. For best results, use as directed by the label.

Water

Your blue tongue skink should have free access to a large, shallow bowl of fresh, clean water daily.

For more information about blue tongue skink care, read the full-length [Blue Tongue Skink Care Guide](#) at ReptiFiles.com.

