

## Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*)

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

Bearded dragons are 18-24" long lizards with spiky grayish, beige, or orange scales (although other colors are available in captivity). They earned their name from their spiky, expandable throat pouch, which can look very much like a beard — especially when it darkens.

These lizards are native to eastern and central Australia. They can be found in a variety of habitats, including desert, scrub, and dry forests. Although they are widely considered terrestrial lizards, bearded dragons are skilled climbers and enthusiastic burrowers in their native habitat.

Bearded dragons are one of the most popular pet lizards in the world, with a calm, personable temperament. They live an average of 10-15 years in captivity with good care, although they can live longer.

### Shopping List

- 48"x24"x24" reptile enclosure (preferably front-opening with a mesh top)
- 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
- 24" 6000-7000K LED or fluorescent plant light
- Surge protector with digital timer
- 4-6" of naturalistic substrate
- Large reptile hideout/cave
- Environmental enrichment items (logs, branches, plants, rocks, etc.)
- Food and water dishes
- Calcium powder supplement (low or no D3)
- Multivitamin powder supplement
- Soft-tipped feeding tweezers

### Housing

Leading modern bearded dragon husbandry experts recommend keeping bearded dragons 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 excellent ventilation.

**Can multiple bearded dragons be housed together?**

Bearded dragons are territorial rather than social, which means that keeping multiple bearded dragons in the same enclosure can lead to fighting and serious (sometimes even fatal) injuries. So it's best to keep only one bearded dragon per enclosure.

## Lighting & UVB

Bearded dragons 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" bearded dragon enclosure, you will need a 22" Arcadia Dragon 14% 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 4.0-6.0 in the basking area.)*

### Full-Spectrum Lighting

Bright light with a color temperature of 6000-7000K is suggested by experts to be important to bearded dragons' mental health. Bearded dragons with additional "daylight" lighting in their enclosure seem to be more alert and active than those without, as well as demonstrating better appetite and more natural behaviors.

Full-spectrum lighting is not the same as reptile UVB lighting, so you will need two separate lamps. The 22" Arcadia Jungle Dawn LED Bar and Bio Dude Glow & Grow are both excellent lamps for this purpose.

## Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Bearded dragons, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. Bearded dragons 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:** 70-85°F (21-29°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

Bearded dragons should have an **average ambient humidity of 30-60%**, 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 than 60% can make your bearded dragon sick.

## Substrate

Bearded dragons are healthiest and happiest when they are housed on a substrate (a.k.a. “bedding”) that imitates the conditions of their natural habitat. In eastern and central Australia, that habitat includes very sandy soil. So the substrate in your bearded dragon’s enclosure should be fine sand or sandy soil, packed at least 4” deep — preferably deeper, if possible.

[Jurassic Natural Australian Desert Dragon Habitat](#), [Jurassic Reptile Substrate](#), [Zoo Med ReptiSand](#), and [The Bio Dude Terra Sahara](#) are all suitable bearded dragon substrate options. You can also make your own DIY desert mix of [50% play sand, 30% organic topsoil, and 20% Zoo Med Excavator Clay](#).

Sick or wounded bearded dragons 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 bearded dragon’s enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your dragon’s natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nice! Here are some ideas:

- Cork logs
- Cork flats
- Sturdy branches
- Live or artificial plants
- Hammocks

## Food

Bearded dragons 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:

- **Hatchlings (0-6 months old): Insects 2x/day, vegetables daily**
- **Juveniles (6-12 months old): Insects 1x/day, vegetables daily**
- **Adults (>12 months old): Insects 2-3x/week, vegetables daily**

To put this in percentages, you're looking at roughly 60-80% protein for hatchlings, 50-60% for juveniles, and 20-30% for adults. It is perfectly fine to occasionally skip a feeding, and helps keep your beardie at a healthy weight.

The key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for your pet bearded dragon 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.

Feeder insects: crickets, dubia roaches, red runner roaches, black soldier fly larvae, mealworms, darkling beetles, hornworms, silkworms, snails, grasshoppers

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 bearded dragon 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**

All living things on this planet need water, including the ones that live in the desert. Bearded dragons are no exception, and should have free access to a shallow bowl of fresh, clean water daily.

Bathing or soaking your bearded dragon is an unnecessary practice, and is not beneficial to your dragon's health.

For more information about bearded dragon care, read the full-length [Bearded Dragon Care Guide](#) at [ReptiFiles.com](#).