

## Sandfish Skink (*Scincus spp.*)

**Difficulty:** Easy

Sandfish skinks earned their name from their incredible ability to “swim” through sand. They are 6-8” long lizards with smooth scales, a stout body, short legs, a wedge-shaped snout, feather-like toes, and tiny black eyes. Color and pattern varies depending on species.

There are 3 known species of sandfish skink: Common Sandfish (*S. scincus*), Eastern Sandfish (*S. mitranus*), and the Arabian Sandfish (*S. hemprichii*). For photos and descriptions of each species, visit <https://reptifiles.com/sandfish-care-guide/scincus-species/>.

These lizards are native to the sandy deserts of northern Africa and the Arabian peninsula. Although they are diurnal (day-active), when they’re not basking or hunting, they prefer to spend most of their time under the sand.

Sandfish skinks are remarkably hardy and fairly easy to care for, which makes them a good first reptile if you don’t mind having a pet that doesn’t like to be held and spends most of its time out of sight. They live up to about 10 years in captivity with good care.

### Shopping List

- 30” x 12” x 12” reptile enclosure (preferably front-opening with mesh top)
- 5.5” dome heat lamp with ceramic socket
- 90w PAR38 halogen flood bulb
- Plug-in lamp dimmer
- Infrared thermometer (“temperature gun”)
- 22” T5 HO forest UVB bulb (Arcadia or Zoo Med brand)
- 24” T5 HO light fixture with reflector
- 24” 6500K LED or fluorescent plant light
- Surge protector with digital timer
- 6” of fine sand
- Environmental enrichment items (logs, branches, plants, caves, etc.)
- Water dish, medium
- Calcium powder supplement (low or no D3)
- Multivitamin powder supplement
- Soft-tipped feeding tweezers

### Housing

House your pet sandfish in no smaller than a 20 gallon (30”L x 12”W x 12”H) enclosure, preferably larger. The enclosure should be front-opening for easy access, and should have excellent ventilation.

**Can multiple sandfish be housed together?**

Possibly. They are typically found one at a time in the wild, so it's safe and arguably best to house one per enclosure.

However, sandfish seem to get along well when housed together, but only when they have enough space to get away from each other. To house two sandfish in the same enclosure, you will need at least a 36" x 18" x 18". Males should never be housed together or else they may fight and injure each other.

## Lighting & UVB

Sandfish 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. All lights should be on for 12 hours/day, which is best done with a timer.

### 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 12" tall enclosure, you will need a 22" T5 HO Zoo Med Reptisun 5.0 or Arcadia D3+ Forest 6% bulb, placed on the warm side of the enclosure.

*(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 2.0-3.0 in the basking area.)*

### Full-Spectrum Lighting

Bright light with a color temperature of around 6500K is suggested by experts to be important to diurnal reptiles' mental health. Sandfish with additional "daylight" lighting in their enclosure are likely to be more alert and active than those without, as well as having 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. Sandfish, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. Sandfish warm up by basking under the sun in the wild, whether out in the open or near the surface of the sand.

In captivity, sandfish are likely to do best with a halogen heat lamp as a heat source.

- **Basking surface temperature:** 130-140°F (54-60°C)
- **Cool zone temperature:** 80-90°F (26-32°C)

Generally speaking, a 90w PAR38 halogen flood bulb should be plenty to achieve those basking temperatures in a 12" tall enclosure with 6" of substrate. However, if you notice that it's getting too hot, dial it down with a plug-in lamp dimmer. If your it's too cool, you need a higher wattage bulb.

To measure the basking surface temperature, use an infrared thermometer (a.k.a. temperature gun). The Etekcity 774 is a good infrared thermometer to use.

## Humidity

Since sandfish skinks are native to some of the driest areas in the world, they don't need much in the way of humidity. This is one of the reasons why they're some of the easiest reptiles to keep! That being said, like every other living thing on Earth, *they do need water!* In the wild, sandfish will seek out areas of higher humidity such as near small bodies of water, under rocks, or pockets of moist sand as needed.

Recreate this in your sandfish's enclosure by drilling a notch into a thin PVC pipe, and then inserting it vertically until the notch is touching the bottom of the enclosure. Regularly trickle water through this pipe (about once a week or every other week, depending on how fast it dries out) to create a damp layer of sand at the bottom of the enclosure.

Alternatively, you can use a sheet of PVC or stone tile to partition off about 1/4 of the sand, and then keep this area moistened via misting with distilled water. I find using a pressure sprayer like the [Exo Terra Mister](#) very helpful for this.

## Substrate

Sandfish are built to live in the sand. So as you can imagine, they're healthiest and happiest when their enclosure offers a nice 6" thick layer of fine sand for them to "swim" through!

[Jurassic Sands Reptile Substrate](#) and [Zoo Med ReptiSand](#) are the best options for providing a fine, loose sand for your sandfish enclosure. If this is not possible, washed play sand can be used in a pinch.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. Substrate should be completely replaced once every 3 months.

## Décor

Although sandfish spend most of their time under the sand, decorations still play an important role in your sandfish's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your pet'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
- Caves

## Food

Sandfish skinks are *insectivores*, which means that they depend on a diet of bugs for the nutrition that their bodies need. How often and how much they need to eat depends on age:

- **Hatchlings (under 3" long)** — 2x/day
- **Juveniles (3-5" long)** — 1x/day
- **Adults (at least 5" long)** — Once every other day

Offer as many bugs as the sandfish will finish in about 5 minutes. However it's alright to leave some loose in the enclosure, as this will give the sandfish something to chase throughout the day.

Feeder insects: crickets, dubia roaches, red runner roaches, discoid roaches, mealworms, darkling beetles, black soldier fly larvae, small locusts

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

### Supplements

To ensure that your sandfish 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. Sandfish are no exception, and should have free access to a shallow bowl of fresh, clean water daily. You will probably find that the water needs to be changed daily simply because your sandfish has filled it with sand!



For more information about sandfish skink care, read the full-length [Sandfish Care Guide](#) at [ReptiFiles.com](#).