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Bearded Dragons

Natural History:

Australian Bearded Dragons (*Pagonna* Sp.) are old world agamids. They get their name from their spiny throat and the ability to display it when threatened. The main bearded dragon found in the pet trade is the Inland Bearded Dragon (*Pagonna vitticeps*). Other species less common are Lawson's dragon (*Pagonna henrylawsoni*) and common bearded dragon (*Pagonna barbata*).

Male bearded dragons are easy sexed when they reach sexual maturity as they have a large head, femoral pores, and cloacal slit when compared to mature females. Immature bearded dragons are more challenging to sex. Subtleties such as head size are helpful but not fool proof. Both mature females and immature females or males may exhibit the forearm wave, which is a submissive behavior to a more dominant lizard.

Caging:

Young bearded dragons should be reared individually for many reasons. Ten to fifteen gallon tanks work well for babies under 4 months. Eating, drinking, and stool output should be closely monitored for each individual. Kept together, babies can inflict serious injuries to each other's tails and limbs. Adults can be kept singly or in pairs depending on the amount of space available and the temperament of each lizard. The bigger the cage, the better. Fifty-five gallon tanks, horse watering troughs, or homemade equivalents are adequate for two lizards. Two males cannot be kept in close quarters.

Though some use sand as the floor substrate, we recommend alfalfa pellets, cypress mulch, indoor/outdoor carpet or newspaper. Young lizards mildly deficient in calcium tend to overeat the sand in the cage causing impactions, slow growers, and poor doers. No matter the substrate used, it should be routinely cleaned at least weekly to prevent bacteria and parasite overpopulation.

Lighting:

The most efficient light source is the Exo Terra Solar Glo. It is a mercury vapor bulb that emits heat, UVB, and UVA. UV light has multiple benefits, including calcium metabolism and improved appetite and activity. Proper calcium metabolism helps protect against metabolic bone disease. Carefully follow the bulb manufacturer's directions for installation. Use a clamp lamp with a ceramic fixture to prevent melting. The fixture should be carefully secured to avoid being bumped and breaking the filament or starting a fire. Make sure to replace the bulb yearly.



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and remember that glass and plastic blocks UV light. If needed, a red bulb can be added for nighttime temperature drops.

Temperature:

Daytime temperatures of 85 degrees Fahrenheit should be reached with a basking area of 90-95 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature can be achieved by using the Solar Glo bulb, infrared heat emitters, under tank heating pads or heat tape. More successful bearded dragon breeders set up tanks that have thermal gradients whereby basking spots are 95 degrees Fahrenheit and the cooler spots are 80-85 degrees. Nighttime temperatures should not drop below 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Feeding and Watering:

Bearded dragons are omnivorous, which means they will eat vegetables and animal matter. Various appropriately sized insects, such as crickets, can be fed every other day. Vegetable matter should be given on alternate days. Collard, mustard, turnip, dandelion greens are excellent sources of vitamin D3 and calcium. Frozen (thawed) or fresh mixed veggies should complement the greens in approximate equal proportions. The veggies should be cut in proportionate sizes to the dragon.

Calcium is very important for growing babies and egg-laying females. Babies should have their insects dusted at each feeding. It is a good idea to feed hatchlings 2-3 times daily with 2-4 crickets and once with veggies. Insects must be appropriately sized (approximately no larger than half the width of the head). Never feed mealworms to babies as they will vomit up the exoskeleton, and become rapidly dehydrated. Feeding high quality vegetables and gut-loaded crickets/insects will decrease the need to supplement with calcium. With good UVB lighting or outside enclosures, a pure calcium supplement such as crushed cherry TUMS is adequate.

Baby bearded dragons do best if they are watered or misted twice daily. Misting the side of the tank or dripping water in a shallow dish often stimulates them to drink. Dripping water on their head or making a water meniscus also works to stimulate drinking. Older bearded dragons drink less as they get most of their water from their vegetables.

Common Medical Problems:

- Spastic paralysis (stiff hind limbs)
- Vomiting
- Coccidian parasites



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- Flagylated parasites
- Metabolic bone disease
- Mate aggression
- Fatty liver disease and obesity