

Is this the right pet for me?

Keeping a turtle as a pet can be a wonderful experience. They each have their own personalities, learn to recognise their owners and should provide many years of enjoyment.

Recommended for...

- Teenagers and adults.
- People with limited space.
- People after something a little different as a pet.

Lifespan

Up to 40 years depending on the species.

Feeding

Freshwater turtles will eat a variety of foods including fish, insects, tadpoles and crustaceans. In captivity they can be offered whole live fish (e.g. goldfish, guppies, "feeder fish"), pieces of fish (preferably freshwater species), freshwater snails, insects (e.g. crickets, moths, cockroaches, flies) and earthworms. Short-neck turtles can also be offered vegetable matter such as freshwater plants, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, pumpkin etc.

Ensure that any saltwater foods such as white bait and frozen "turtle blocks" are soaked in fresh water for several hours before being offered to your turtle. It should be remembered that freezing food destroys some vitamins (especially vitamin B) and so a balanced diet of frozen and fresh food needs to be given.

Overfeeding of turtles is very common. Adult turtles should be fed 1 to 2 times per week and be fed portions that about the size of their heads.

Any uneaten food should be removed from the tank to help keep the water clean. A better way is to feed your turtles in a separate tank.

NEW TURTLE CHECKLIST

Here's a list of the essentials you'll need for your new Turtle. Please ask any of the Best Friends team to help you with your selections.

Essential equipment

- Terrarium or aquarium tank of appropriate size with suitable heating and lighting.
- A good quality filter of the right type and size.

Food

- Source of food items crickets, moths, cockroaches, tadpoles, fresh water fish and freshwater snails. Vegetables such as spinach, cabbage, broccoli and pumpkin for short-neck turtles.

Special Offer:



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For more information and store details go to
www.bestfriendspets.com.au

Caring for your Turtle





Selecting a Turtle

There are only a few different species of turtle that are commonly offered as pets in Victoria. These include the Eastern Long-neck Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*) and the short-necked Macquarie River Turtle (*Emydura macquarii*). Before deciding on purchasing a turtle it is important to do your research. Keeping a turtle is more labour intensive than keeping some of the other reptile species such as snakes and lizards. Because of their aquatic lifestyle they require more maintenance and have some particular husbandry issues.



Licence Requirements

By law all Australian turtles are protected and but unlike many other reptile species licences are generally not required to buy and keep many species as pets. Specific information regarding licence types, species allowed to be kept and licence fees can be obtained from the Department of Sustainability and Environment by calling **136 186** or at www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Handling

Turtles are not an animal that should be handled excessively. They will either pull their head and legs in and hide or they will try and escape being held. Some turtles even have glands in their shell that release a foul smelling liquid when they get stressed.

Housing

Turtles can be adequately housed in indoor Terrarium. They need to be in water to eat, drink and defaecate. A single adult turtle can be kept in a 1.2m x 30cm x 50cm tank though the larger the tank the better. There needs to be an area at one end of the tank where the turtle can be completely dry. This basking area can be heated with an overhead heat lamp but be sure to use a thermometer to monitor the in-tank temperature as it should be around 30°C.

The water should be of a minimum depth equivalent to 2 times the

length of the turtle's shell length. It should be heated to between 20 and 24°C using an aquarium heater. This heater should be protected from being broken with a heater guard.

Maintaining water quality is essential for keeping your turtle healthy. Turtles produce large amounts of waste it needs to be removed from the water as soon as possible. The water must be continuously filtered and this is best achieved using an external canister filter. These contain a sponge for removing solid wastes, a layer of carbon for removing dissolved wastes and another layer that allows special bacteria to grow that remove toxic nitrogen compounds such as ammonium, nitrite and nitrate. In addition to having a filter weekly 25% water changes should be performed. It is also good practice to regularly test the water for those toxic nitrogen compounds as well as pH and hardness.

The provision of UV light for up to 12 hours a day is vital for the health of your turtle. Without access to UV light they can develop a potentially fatal condition called Metabolic Bone Disease. There is no substitute to natural unfiltered sunlight and turtles should be placed in sunlight for 20-30 minutes every 2 to 3 days. Be careful, however, about placing your terrarium in direct sunlight as this can cause the temperature to overheat rapidly. UV lights should be changed every 6 to 9 months.

Health

It can be difficult to tell if your turtle is sick or not. For this reason it is important to keep accurate records of items such as body weight, feeding schedules and water test results. This allows for patterns to be established because turtles can get sick slowly and often the symptoms are not noticed until too late. The Our Vet™ team recommend twice yearly checkups.

Common disease problems include shell and skin infections, nutritional deficiencies and abscesses.

Reptiles and Salmonella

Most, if not all, reptiles carry the bacteria, Salmonella in their intestinal tract and pass this in their faeces. While it usually does not cause disease in the reptile it can cause serious illness in people. Infection can be easily prevented by ensuring you wash your hands after handling your turtle and equipment and using good, common sense hygiene practices.

Responsible pet ownership

In most areas of Australia you are required by law to register your pets. In some cases there are restrictions on the number and types of pets you are allowed to keep. Check with your local government for further information on your rights and responsibilities both to your turtle and to your neighbours.

Further Information

An excellent reference book Keeping Long-necked Turtles by Darren Green. It is available at www.reptilepublications.com.au or in Best Friends Stores.