

Australian Blue Tongued Skink (lizard) Care Sheet

Australian Blue Tongue Skinks or Lizards are a not only a great pet but also a good choice of lizard for the beginner.

Blue Tongued Skinks As Pets:

Blue-tongue skinks are very docile, curious lizards. They tame easily and are able to be handled by careful small children. They have small claws, and while they don't particularly scratch, it can be startling and scary to someone who is nervous holding them as their legs are surprisingly strong, particularly on a larger lizard. Always supervise people closely when first handing the lizard to them. Like many omnivorous and carnivorous lizards, blue-tongues find that wriggling human fingers look an awful lot like small wriggling mice...and may try to eat one if they are hungry. As with all such reptiles, it is best to wash your hands before handling them if you have been handling anything they normally eat. Once they are used to being handled, these are one of the most placid of lizards and hence a great pet for beginners.

Generally these lizards are better pets than the larger Iguanids, Agamids and monitors due to their much calmer disposition, shorter claws and smaller size, although at 24", they can still be a reasonably large lizard. The omnivorous diet is another good reason to keep a Blue Tongue in preference to a Green Iguana or Bosc Monitor, which have quite specific dietary regimes in order to maintain good health and prevent diseases.

General appearance:

All blue-tongue skinks tend to have a heavy build with small legs and toes. They also exhibit the typical triangular blunt head of most skinks. All species get their name from a bright blue tongue in their pink or red mouths.

Housing:

A 20 gallon long (12" x 30") cage should be big enough for a young one. Adults need a tank from 55 to 75 gallons cages (see dimensions). A screen cover with locks is recommended or a lockable cage. Larger species may need a cage bigger than 75 gallons. If you construct a cage, the opening of the cage can be sliding glass doors or a hinged door as these lizards are not very fast and will not 'race' out of the cage. The cages in "[How to build Reptile Enclosures](#)" have been used to house blue tongued lizards in a healthy state for quite a few years. Blue tongue skink cage setups are relatively simple. Some hiding places at both the warmer and cooler ends of the cage, some small logs and flattish rocks and water bowls are all that is required, although you can add other cage furniture such as artificial trees and plants to give it a nicer appearance.

Temperature:

Most species of blue tongue skinks will thrive with daytime temperatures from 85 to 90 with a basking area that reaches 95. The night temperatures can drop to the low 70's. Some species will vary in temperature requirements- read up on the individual species to meet their needs. Species from the Southern parts of Australia can tolerate cooler temperatures than species from Northern Australia, New Guinea and Indonesia

A heat pad on the bottom of the tank is recommended along with at least one basking heat light. Hot rocks should never be used due to the high risk of burns that can be inflicted on the animal from malfunctioning heat rocks.

Environment:

Almost all species are ground dwellers and do not require many rocks or branches for climbing. A hide box should be provided for the animal as well as a portion of the enclosure maintained with slightly damp substrate such as sphagnum moss to provide a humidity chamber to help with shedding.

While these are ground dwelling lizards, they do have to clamber over things to get their relatively large bodies over things with their outlandishly tiny legs and feet. Many blue tongues enjoy the exploration and exercise climbing over and through things in their cage, so providing different levels of branches, flat rocks and logs for them to climb on will make for better adjusted lizards. This also helps wear down their claws naturally. Top-opening tanks need to be securely fastened, and open-top tanks need to be deep enough to prevent the blue tongue skink from climbing out.

Maintenance:

The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily. A thorough cleaning should be performed on a regular basis. A 5%

bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before replacing the substrate and placing the lizard back in the enclosure.

Lighting:

Blue Tongued Skinks need a full spectrum fluorescent bulb to produce the vitamins in their skin and bring out better colors. UVB lighting is required for Blue-Tongue Skinks. The Zoo Med REPTISUN 5.0™ with its high UVB and UVA output is an excellent choice. All reptiles and amphibians need a photo period. A plug in timer (for your lights only, do not use a timer for your heating devices) works well and provides a regular photo period (light cycle) of 8-12 hours. The light should be within 12"-15" of the bottom of the cage for maximum effect.

Feeding:

Blue tongues are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. As they have a wide and varied diet in the wild eating insects, worms, grubs, snails, flowers, and plants, they should have a varied diet as pets. You should not be overly concerned about this as their diet is relatively simple to provide.

They will eat nearly any type of plant matter - collard greens, dandelion greens, grapes, apples, broccoli, peas, various berries, banana, peaches, nectarines, and pears during the season.

Do not feed iceberg lettuce or frozen vegetable mixes.

Baby foods and good quality dog food are readily accepted but this should not be a large part of their diet and only given occasionally as they are high in salt content. Crickets are also taken but veggies should make up a large part (60%) of their diet. Gut load the crickets and mix in vitamins and calcium in the food before feeding but do not go over board once or twice a week is plenty. Thawed pre-killed frozen mice can also be fed to your skink. Chicken pieces are also good as a supplement.

A good idea is to make up a salad mix and store it in sealable bag with a piece of absorbent paper towel. This way you can take some out each day and feed it to them. You would also give them some of the other food, such as crickets, mealworms and maybe some fruit. They also love snails. Yum, yum. They will happily crunch the shells to get at the delicious snail inside.

Substrate: Bark chips or bed-a-beast is recommended. Newspaper also works well, as does indoor/outdoor carpet. Do not use cedar or pine shavings.

Humidity:

Blue Tongued Skinks from Australia and the surrounding areas so the humidity should be low, spray the tank lightly once every couple of days. Keep a shallow dish for drinking.

Water:

They should have a bowl of water available at all times. They may defecate in it so it should be checked regularly. Bowl should be big enough for them to climb easily in and out of if it is to be used for bathing but this is not essential.

Handling:

Blue Tongued Skinks are a docile in nature and can and should be handled regularly. Many individuals will accept food from your hand. Handle them as much as possible to allow them to get to know you. Sometimes if they are not handled regularly they may become aggressive when you go to pick them up but they will generally quieten down when handled.

Size:

Can be anywhere from seven to 24 inches in length depending on specific species.

Life span:

Blue tongues are relatively long lived and as they are easy to keep, specimens can reach ages of 20 years or more in captivity

Breeding:

If raised properly, captive bred tongued skinks will breed at about 2 years old. The animals must be healthy and have a good fat store in their tail. Females may be kept together in breeding groups, but only one male should be present. Males, generally have wider heads and their bodies when viewed from above has straight sides. Females have a less bulky head and more rounded sides. This is not often obvious and the only sure way is to wait and see give birth.

The breeding season is January early spring to induce breeding they should be cooled to 130-180C for 2 months. Mating will take place within a few weeks of warming. The males often become aggressive during mating and fights may break out. It is usually better to keep the animals separate and bring them together to mate. This will usually occur immediately and the pair can be separated again. It is better to reintroduce the animals on a regular basis as single matings are seldom successful. During mating the male bites the female around the neck, this will result in bite marks and torn skin. The male will twist his tail under the females to enable mating to occur.

Blue tongue skinks are live bearing, the females usually produce about 5-12 babies, the larger the adult the larger the litter size.

The gestation period is generally around 100 days, this is dependent on temperature and some species tend to have a longer period than others, typically the larger types.

The babies are about 15cm at birth and will grow rapidly with proper feeding and vitamin supplements. Care should be taken when raising juveniles together as larger babies will eat all the food and smaller individuals will be victimised.

Hatchling skinks can be started on mealworms, redworms, small crickets, and pinkie mice. As they grow, increase the size of the prey (small earthworms, Zoophoba larvae and pupae, fuzzies and crews).

Feed the young skinks however much they want to eat, when they want to eat. Feeding frequency will taper off as they grow, so you may find that you are offering food 2-4 times a week. Blue-tongues are pretty eloquent when they are hungry (they clearly fixate on your hands and any other perceived movement, often with their mouth open and body ready to charge or pounce), so they are unlikely to go hungry for long so long as you keep an eye on them.