

**Substrate**

The substrate at the bottom of the cage should help maintain humidity and be resistant to the growth of mold. Sterile potting soil is a good choice. Moss can be added to the top layer to help maintain humidity. The moss should be changed weekly and soil replaced every 3–4 months. Spot clean the cage daily.

**Basking Area and Lighting**

Near the top of the enclosure there should be a basking area. The basking area should have an overhead heat lamp as well as a UV light source. A ceramic heat source provides good radiant heat without adding red or blue light that will keep your dragon awake at night.

The UV light should provide UVA and UVB. Provide an appropriate wattage bulb for the habitat. Keep in mind that glass or very fine mesh will block the UV light, so make sure that the basking area allows the light to enter the enclosure.

Remember that the UV spectrum of the light can fail even if the light still functions. The best recommendation is to change the UV light every 6 months to ensure that good access to UVA and UVB are maintained.

**Temperature**

The daytime temperature range should be 80–88° Fahrenheit (27–31° Celsius) with a basking area of 95°F (35°C). To prevent burns, your pet should be able to approach the basking area but not come into contact with the heat source. Nighttime temperatures should range from 75–80°F (24–27°C).

**Always**

- Take a newly adopted Chinese Water Dragon to an exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness examination and fecal check for parasites.
- Allow exposure to UV lighting during the day. UVA light encourages normal behaviors while UVB light supports overall health.
- Allow 12–13 hours of daylight during the summer and 11–12 hours per day in the winter.
- Clean the cage regularly to prevent mold growth in the humid enclosure.
- Be aware that Chinese Water Dragons will lay very still on their back as a normal defensive behavior; however, this could be a sign of stress for them and should not be done for fun.



**Most Common Disorders of Chinese Water Dragons**

- Internal parasites
- Poor appetite or energy from improper husbandry
- Metabolic disorders (including nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism, commonly known as metabolic bone disease)
- Abrasions on the nose or chin from rubbing glass
- Skin infection
- Retained shed
- Aggression
- Trauma
- Impaction

Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your Chinese Water Dragon. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting [www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

**Additional Reading**

- Chinese Water Dragons as Pets* by Auric Smith
- Chinese Water Dragon Care Reptiles Magazine* on line resource

**HOW TO KEEP YOUR CHINESE WATER DRAGON HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!**



Published by



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## CHINESE WATER DRAGONS

Chinese Water Dragons, also known as Asian Water Dragons, are native to parts of Southern China as well as Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. They are well adapted to life in warm, humid environments and spend much of their time in the branches of trees.

Chinese Water Dragons (*Physignathus cocincinus*) have been popular pets for several decades. Most of the water dragons now found in the pet trade are captive bred. This is important because they are better adapted to life in captivity and will be healthier than their wild caught counterparts. It's also important because keeping captive bred water dragons helps preserve the wild population in their native habitat.

Chinese Water Dragons do not get very large and make great pets. They are very fast, but with regular handling, become accustomed to their human caretakers and relax when being handled.

In their enclosure, Chinese Water Dragons can be quite lively and fun to watch.

Following adoption of a water dragon, it should be taken to a reptile veterinarian for a general health check and a fecal exam for parasites.

### Is my Chinese Water Dragon male or female?

In young water dragons, it may be difficult to visually distinguish a male from a female. Some veterinarians may consider cloacal probing, but the safest, most reliable method is waiting until individuals have matured enough to develop secondary sex characteristics: the male normally has a taller crest on the head and neck, taller and more prominent spines on the crest, wider heads, bilateral hemipenal bulges at the base of the tail, and slightly more well developed femoral pores. They may be more than 1 foot (30 cm) long before these characteristics are detected.

If maintaining more than one in an enclosure, it's recommended to have only one male and 2–3 females.

### Diet

A good mix of live insect prey items should be offered to your Water Dragon on a regular basis. Most of them do best with daily feedings, but some older dragons can be fed every other day. A variety of insects and small invertebrates can be offered, including crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches and earthworms. The prey should be offered a calcium supplement and a good variety of vegetables for at least 48 hours prior to being offered as food. Most of the insects should be dusted daily with a high quality calcium supplement that contains no additional vitamins. A multivitamin supplement can be dusted on the prey items weekly in place of the calcium.

Every 2–4 weeks you can offer a single whole prey item such as a pinkie or a feeder fish.

## WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY CHINESE WATER DRAGON

### Vital Statistics

#### Body length:

2–3 feet (61–91 cm) as adults

#### Body weight:

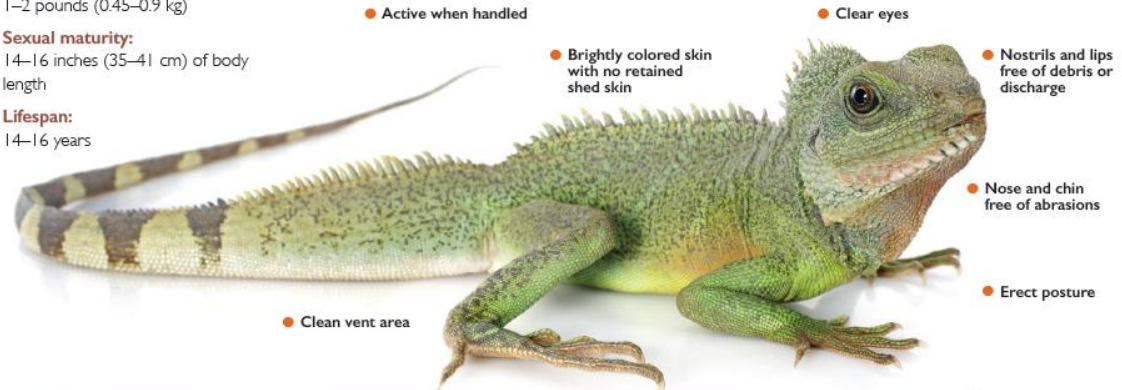
1–2 pounds (0.45–0.9 kg)

#### Sexual maturity:

14–16 inches (35–41 cm) of body length

#### Lifespan:

14–16 years



**NOTE:** Most, if not all, reptiles and amphibians carry *Salmonella* bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles and amphibians, including Chinese Water Dragons. For more information, please see the handout, *Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners* at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.



Up to 15% of the diet can be offered as vegetable matter. You can offer dandelion greens, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, butternut squash, bell pepper, okra and bok choy, for example. All vegetable matter should be chopped into very small pieces. Reptiles should never be fed avocado.

Foods designed for other animals should not be fed. Commercial diets designed for cats, dogs or other animals can have the wrong mix of nutrients and can create health problems.

### Water

As the name suggests, these animals are used to a very wet environment. The humidity in their enclosure should be maintained at about 80% and a digital hygrometer should be used to verify this humidity.

A water bowl should be available at all times large enough for your dragon to fully submerge. The water should be changed daily.

### Housing

Chinese Water Dragons are arboreal (tree dwelling) animals. The enclosure should offer a good amount of vertical space. An adult dragon should have an enclosure that is 4–6 feet (121–183 cm) high and 3–4 feet (91–122) cm long on each side. Branches and vines of various sizes should be placed to allow movement up the entire area of the cage.

Humidity can be difficult to maintain. Glass or plexiglass enclosures help maintain humidity well, however the top should be screened to help improve ventilation. A cage that does not have proper ventilation increases the chance for growth of pathogens like bacteria and fungus. A glass terrarium should be cleaned often. Humidity can also be maintained by the use of waterfalls, misting systems, drip systems or regularly spraying the cage with water.

When using a glass enclosure for Chinese Water Dragons, make sure to place something dark around the bottom few inches of the glass. Water dragons don't recognize the glass and they will rub against it trying to move through. Placing an apparent obstruction in that area can prevent damage to the end of their nose.

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