

### Water

A water container that is large enough for the tegu to completely submerge is a necessity. This will help your animal maintain hydration and will help your animal to shed appropriately. It also stimulates natural swimming and soaking behaviors. Soaking twice weekly is recommended, unless your tegu is observed to be soaking himself at least twice weekly.

### Supplements

A phosphorus free, vitamin D3 free, calcium supplement is recommended to be sprinkled onto food or mixed into the food once to twice weekly.

A multivitamin is recommended to be sprinkled onto food or mixed into the food once weekly.

Supplementation recommendations do not vary with the age of your animal.

### Tips For a Happy, Healthy Animal

- Provide enrichment to encourage their intelligent nature and natural foraging and hunting behaviors.
- Provide a widely varied diet.
- Make sure your animal has a large enclosure.
- Make sure the environment provides ample space for digging.
- Maintain appropriate humidity.
- Provide a water source large enough to soak and swim in.
- Socialize your tegu often. This is especially important when your animal is young.

### It is Important to Avoid

- Avoid feeding too much fruit.
- Avoid over feeding in general.
- Avoid non-secure enclosures.



### Common Disorders

- Nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism (or metabolic bone disease)
- Obesity
- Obstruction from substrate ingestion
- Dehydration
- Respiratory infections

### Additional Reading

<http://www.reptilesmagazine.com/Tegu-Lizard-Housing-And-Care-Information/>

<http://www.exoticpetvet.com/tegu-care.html>

*Monitors, Tegus, and Related Lizards*, Patricia Bartlett

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 Tegus Lizard. For help in finding a reptile/amphibian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians ([www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org)) or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners ([www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate))

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR TEGU LIZARD HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!



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## NATURAL HISTORY

Tegus are one of the larger species of lizards kept in captivity. Tegus originate from South America. In captivity, the *Salvator* species are the most commonly kept and include the Argentine black and white tegu (*Salvator merianae*) and the Red tegu (*Salvator rufescens*). These species are larger than the Tupinambis, or Colombian, tegus. They are also more docile in captivity than the Colombian tegus. The most common Tupinambis kept in captivity is the Colombian black and white tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*).

Tegus can be found in many environments, including rainforests, savannahs, semi-deserts, and grasslands. The Tupinambis species are also thought to be semi-aquatic.

Tegus have long bodies and long tails. They have very powerful legs and can run fast with an undulating motion to their bodies. The tip of their tongue is forked to help them "smell" their environment better. By flicking their tongue, they acquire sensory information from the environment, and when the tongue is replaced into the mouth, a gland at the roof of the mouth, the vomeronasal gland, or Jacobson's organ, helps process this information.

## What to Expect From My Animal

Tegus are extremely intelligent animals. They require a lot of environmental enrichment to prevent them from getting bored.

They are personable and often become tame with time, patience, and appropriate and consistent handling. Tegus are known for forming bonds with their owners and some tegus will even choose to spend time with their caretakers instead of hunting or eating. There are some personality differences between species. For instance, the Colombian gold tegu (*Tupinambis teguixin*) can be more difficult to tame than the Argentine black and white tegu (*Salvator merianae*). However, all tegus can be tame if treated properly.

## Is My Animal Male or Female?

Gender determination can be somewhat difficult with young individuals. However, males have a single larger scale on the underside of their tail base on both sides of their cloacal vent that is missing in females. These spots can be felt as small raised bumps and often get larger with sexual maturity.

Once your tegu is mature at around 2-3 years old, males are easy to spot with their large and well-developed jowls. Males also tend to have more vibrant colors with greater color variation than females.

## Housing and Substrate

Tegus are large, mostly ground dwelling, burrowing lizards that eventually grow to need an enclosure that is, at a minimum 6-foot-long, 3-foot-deep, and 3 feet tall (180cm x 90cm x 90cm). This gives them room to dig, climb on low branches, soak, swim, and sprawl out while basking.

Tegus love to dig and burrow. Given the appropriate substrate they will often spend most of their time buried. In order to provide appropriate enrichment, a varied substrate is recommended. It is recommended to have newspaper or butcher paper as a base, with a large section of deep (2 feet (60cm)) topsoil or aspen bedding for encouragement of natural burrowing behavior. The papered area provides an area to safely feed your tegu while avoiding substrate ingestion and provides an easier way to clean the naturalistic substrate.

## WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY TEGU LIZARD

### Vital Statistics:

#### Body length

Females 3 ft (100cm)

Males 4.5 ft (150cm)

#### Body weight

2.5 - 7.0kg (5.5 - 15.5 lbs)

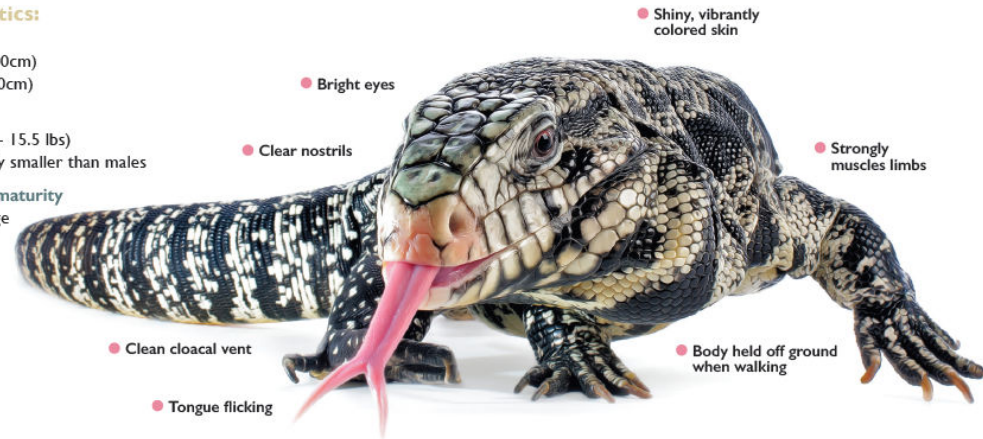
Females typically smaller than males

#### Age of sexual maturity

2 - 3 years of age

#### Longevity

15 - 20 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 tegu lizards. For more information, please see the handout, *Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners* at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.



It is very important to have a secure and sturdy enclosure. Tegus are intelligent and strong, making them good escape artists.

## Temperature and Humidity Requirements

Temperature in the enclosures should range from 75° Fahrenheit (24° Celsius) on the cool side to 85-95° Fahrenheit (29-35° Celsius) on the warm side. There needs to be a basking area where the temperature reaches 95-100° Fahrenheit (35-38° Celsius). Thermometers on the cool side and at the basking site should be used to monitor temperatures and thermostats can be used to control temperatures.

With tegus being from South America, their humidity requirements are high and should be maintained around 80%. This is maintained with a large soaking area, topsoil, misting systems or hand misting the enclosure as needed. Hygrometers should be used to monitor this humidity.

## Lighting Requirements

When housed indoors, tegus require UVB lighting. This should be provided with a 12-hour light, 12-hour dark schedule. Their UVB requirements are not high and a 5.0 UVB bulb should be

sufficient. There may be times they require higher levels of UVB lighting (such as during reproductive times) and this should be discussed with your veterinarian.

## Diet

Tegus are omnivores. Young tegus will be primarily insectivores. Gradually they will move up to larger prey items. Offer a variety of insects, such as crickets, dubia roaches, phoenix worms, etc. Adults can be fed frozen thawed rodents, eggs, lean ground meats (specifically ground turkey) and a variety of veggies and fruits. The vegetables may need to be shredded and mixed with the meat at first to encourage them to eat the vegetables and fruits. Another option for feeding adults would be feeding a formulated diet such as Mazuri™ carnivore that is supplemented with Mazuri™ tortoise, or Purina™ trout chow. Make sure the diet that is offered is varied often to make sure all essential nutrients are offered.

Feeding frequency guidelines:

- Hatchling to 1-year tegus should be fed every day
- 1-year to adult size (3-year): every other day
- Adults (>3 year) every 3 days

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