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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Mojave Desert Tortoise

Gopherus agassizii

Gopherus agassizii is a large, high-domed tortoise from the Mojave Desert in the south-western USA. It digs deep burrows and spends most of the year underground, sheltered from the heat and cold of the desert. The shell length is 25-35 cm. The species needs a large, sunny outdoor enclosure with dry, diggable soil and a long winter dormancy.

Family: Testudinidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**25-35 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**3,500-7,000 g**
Lifespan	**50-80 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Burrowing**
Habitat	**Desert and semi-desert**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**240 × 120 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-30 °C**
Basking spot	**32-36 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**5-12 °C** 12-20 weeks
Diet	**Plants**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**120-240 months**
Clutch size	**2-12 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-3**
Incubation	**80-135 days** at 27-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Critically Endangered (CR)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Little has been published about keeping *Gopherus agassizii* outside its range. The care advice rests on the habitat and on care guidelines for the species from its home country.
TEMPERATURE	By day the temperature should be 24-30 °C, with a basking spot of 32-36 °C under a heat lamp, measured on the substrate. At night 18-22 °C is suitable, and the heat is switched off.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The species belongs to a dry climate, and the relative humidity should be 30-50%. Keep the substrate mostly dry, but make a slightly more humid spot under a hide or in an artificial burrow where the animal can rest.
LIGHTING AND UVB	The species is diurnal and basks a lot. Sunlight is best, and the animal should be out in the sun as often as the weather allows; artificial light cannot replace one to two hours of sunlight a day.
FEEDING	*G. agassizii* is a herbivore, and grazing is the foundation.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	The species is calm and busies itself with digging, eating and basking. It uses many burrows and hides and should have at least one dry hide at each end of the enclosure.
NATIVE RANGE	United States.