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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Gopher Tortoise

Gopherus polyphemus

Gopherus polyphemus is a large, dark tortoise from dry, sandy woodland in the south-eastern USA. It digs burrows up to 12 m long, which several hundred other animal species use as shelter. The shell length is 23-30 cm. The species needs a large outdoor enclosure with deep, dry sandy soil, plenty of grass and an artificial burrow.

Family: Testudinidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**23-30 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**2,000-6,000 g**
Lifespan	**60-100 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Burrowing**
Habitat	**Savanna**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**200 × 100 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-30 °C**
Basking spot	**32-36 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**40-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Plants**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**108-240 months**
Clutch size	**3-15 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 30-31 °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 polyphemus*. The care advice rests on the habitat and on the closely related *Gopherus agassizii*, which has the same burrowing way of life.
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 needs a relative humidity of 40-70%, and in the burrow it can be up to 80%. Keep the surface dry, but make the burrow more humid by putting damp soil and leaves at the bottom.
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. Indoors there must be UVB lighting with a UV index of 2.0-3.0 at the basking spot (Ferguson zone 3).
FEEDING	*G. polyphemus* is a grazer, and grass makes up about 80% of the diet.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	The animal is solitary and spends most of its time digging, eating and basking. In the wild the animals live in colonies with closely spaced burrows, and some females repeatedly visit the same female's burrow.
NATIVE RANGE	United States.