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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Western Box Turtle

Terrapene ornata

Terrapene ornata is a small, terrestrial box turtle from the prairies of the central USA. The shell is dark with yellow radiating lines, and the plastron is hinged, so the animal can close itself completely inside. The species is diurnal, omnivorous, lively and long-lived, and it needs a dry, warm, well-drained substrate, strong light with UVB, plenty of space and preferably an outdoor enclosure in summer.

Family: Emydidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**10-15 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**200-540 g**
Lifespan	**30-40 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and savanna**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**21-25 °C**
Basking spot	**32-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-20 °C**
Humidity	**30-60%**
Water	**Water dish** depth 2-4 cm
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**5-8 °C** 8-16 weeks
Diet	**Insects, fruit, complete diet, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**60-96 months**
Clutch size	**1-8 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**50-90 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Near Threatened (NT)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	*Terrapene ornata* does best outdoors in a large, secure enclosure with well-drained soil. Choose a sunny spot with no standing water, with both sun and shade throughout the day.
TEMPERATURE	Indoors there should be a basking spot of 32-35 °C and a cool zone of 21-25 °C.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	*T. ornata* tolerates drier air than other box turtles. Adults do well at an average humidity of 30-60 %, while young need 60-70 % so that they do not dry out. Measure with a digital hygrometer in the middle of the enclosure.
LIGHTING AND UVB	*T. ornata* is diurnal and needs strong light and UVB to produce vitamin D3. Use a 6 % T5 HO UVB tube in a reflector fitting over the warm end, so that it overlaps with the heat lamps.
FEEDING	*T. ornata* is omnivorous. Young animals are mainly carnivorous, and adults eat more plant matter, but the species is still more carnivorous than other box turtles.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*T. ornata* is active, alert and curious and sets off exploring as soon as it is put down. It is more inclined to bite than other box turtles if it feels threatened.
NATIVE RANGE	United States and Mexico.