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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

European Pond Turtle

Emys orbicularis

Emys orbicularis is a diurnal, semi-aquatic freshwater turtle from southern, central and eastern Europe, North Africa and western Asia. The shell typically reaches 15-20 cm, and the animal can live for many decades. The species is best kept in a large, sunny, escape-proof garden pond where it can also hibernate, and it needs sun or UVB, warmth in summer and a cold winter rest.

Family: Emydidae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**12-23 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**400-700 g**
Lifespan	**30-100 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**170 × 75 × 75 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-30 °C**
Basking spot	**35 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-20 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 40-60 cm
Water temperature	**24-28 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**4-6 °C** 8-16 weeks
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, plants, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**In pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**48-216 months**
Clutch size	**3-20 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**60-120 days** at 26-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix III**
EU annex	**Annex C**
IUCN	**Near Threatened (NT)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE
Adult *Emys orbicularis* are best kept outdoors in an enclosed garden pond with sun, plants and a soft bottom.

TEMPERATURE
In an outdoor pond the temperature follows the season, and the animals regulate their own heat by basking. The pond must be sunny and sheltered.

HUMIDITY AND WATER
Humidity is not decisive for a water turtle, and 50-80 % in the room is ample. What matters is the cleanliness of the water. The animal passes its droppings in the water, and the water quickly becomes dirty in an aquaterrarium.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY
The water is the animal's living space, so it must be deep, clean and full of hides. Indoors 40-60 cm of water and 24-28 °C are suitable.

LIGHTING AND UVB
Outdoors the animal gets the sun's own UVB when there is no glass or dense netting in between, and the basking spots must be in full sun for most of the day. Indoors UVB is necessary.

FEEDING
Emys orbicularis is omnivorous with the emphasis on small animals. In the wild it eats insects and their larvae, especially dragonfly nymphs, snails, crustaceans, worms, tadpoles and dead fish, but also aquatic plants.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING
E. orbicularis is diurnal and in the wild shy and cautious. In captivity it quickly gets used to its keeper and comes to the feeding spot, but it does not like being handled.

NATIVE RANGE
Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan.