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TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Common Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina

Terrapene carolina is a small, high-domed, terrestrial pond turtle from eastern North America. The plastron has a hinge, so the animal can close itself completely inside the shell. The species is diurnal, omnivorous and very long-lived, but it requires humidity, a large enclosure, calm care and usually a carefully managed hibernation.

Family: Emydidae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**11-20 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**40-50 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Wetland and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**160 × 80 × 40 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**21-24 °C**
Basking spot	**29-31 °C**
Temperature, night	**10-20 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water dish** depth 2-5 cm
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects, fruit, complete diet, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**3-8 eggs**
Incubation	**50-90 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	*Terrapene carolina* does best in a large, secure outdoor enclosure, and a large enclosure is always better than a small one. Choose a sunny, wind-sheltered spot with well-drained soil, morning sun and shade all day.
TEMPERATURE	Indoors there must be a basking spot of 29-31 °C and a cool zone of 21-24 °C.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	*T. carolina* comes from humid habitats and does well at an average humidity of 60-80 %, which must never fall below about 50 %.
LIGHTING AND UVB	*T. carolina* is diurnal and needs strong light and UVB to produce vitamin D3. Use a T5 HO UVB tube of about 6 % over the basking spot, so that it overlaps the heat lamps.
FEEDING	*T. carolina* is omnivorous. For the first 5-6 years young animals are mainly carnivores, while adults eat more plant food.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*T. carolina* is shy and poorly suited to being picked up. Many animals do, however, learn to know their keeper, take food from the fingers and enjoy a gentle shell massage.
NATIVE RANGE	United States, Mexico and Canada.