

# Musk Turtle

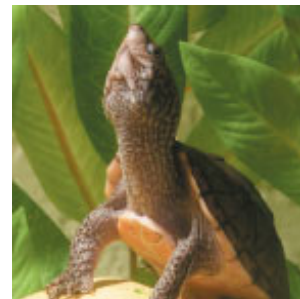
Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



"Musk Turtle" can actually refer to one of five different species, but their care is fairly similar. With the exception of their individual appearances, this profile only covers general information regarding the overall genus (*Sternotherus*), and we urge you to further research your specific turtle in order to properly care for it.

## Species Profile: Musk Turtle

<b>Scientific Name:</b>	<i>Sternotherus carinatus</i> - Razor-backed Musk Turtle <i>Sternotherus depressus</i> - Flattened Musk Turtle <i>Sternotherus minor</i> - Loggerhead Musk Turtle <i>Sternotherus minor peltifer</i> - Stripe-neck Musk Turtle <i>Sternotherus odoratus</i> - Common Musk Turtle
<b>Natural Environment:</b>	United States from the border of Canada down to Florida and west to the Rocky Mountains
<b>Average Size:</b>	Varies by species; the largest is the Razor-backed Musk turtle with a carapace length of 6". The rest of the Musk turtles average between 3" and 5".
<b>Average Life Span:</b>	Exact life span unknown, but upwards of 20 years
<b>Appearance:</b>	The Razor-backed Musk turtle has a long neck, short legs, and a sharp beak. The carapace is brown with black markings at the edge of each scute, and it has a keel down the center. The body and head are grey brown with black spotting.



The Flattened Musk turtle is named such because it doesn't have a keel down its carapace; the top of it is flattened. The upper shell is yellowish-brown to dark brown with small black spots and streaks. The body and head is an olive-green color mottled with black.



The Loggerhead Musk turtle has a keeled carapace that is brown or orange with dark seams. The shell may have dark spots or streaks. The head and body are pinkish, gray or orange with dark markings.

The Stripe-neck Musk turtle's carapace is also keeled. It can be brown to olive brown in color, and it may have small black spots. The head has black spotting on the top, and the throat has alternating stripes of yellow, black, and brown.

The Common Musk turtle has a long neck and short legs. The body is black, grey, or brown. There is a yellow-green stripe running from the tip of the nose down the neck. The carapace is domed, and it is brown or black.

**Habitat**

**Size:** 20 gallon aquarium for hatchling, 40 gallon or larger for adult

**Lighting:** [Basking lamp](#), UVB light

**Temperature:** Basking area should be 90° F; exact water temperature will vary by species. Those that are found further south will need a higher water temperature, and you will probably need to use a submersible heater.

**Housing:** Musk turtles need a fairly long aquarium to provide them with plenty of room to swim. Hatchlings will need a water depth of approximately 2" to 4", while adults will need a water depth of 8" to 12". A good [filtration system](#) is essential to your turtle's overall health, and a canister filter works well for an adult's habitat. Because the water is shallower in a juvenile's tank, you will need to use a submersible foam filter, power filter, or a [filter designed for low water levels](#), and change the water frequently.

Though the number of accessories you put in the aquarium should be kept to a minimum to allow you to keep the habitat cleaner, there are certain items you will need to use to create a suitable environment. You will need to have one

or two hiding places, or "caves," underwater. You can use a half flowerpot or create your own with rockwork. Just be sure that the rocks are very sturdy so they won't collapse on your turtle. You will also need to build one end of the enclosure up with rocks, [driftwood](#), or other materials to create a basking area. Because they spend most of their time underwater on the bottom of the tank, they don't use a basking area much, but you should still create one.

You should also add live or artificial plants to create a more naturalistic feel as well as provide hiding spots. However, your turtle will probably eat them, or try to, so be prepared to replace them regularly and research any live plants you use to make sure they're safe for your turtle.

**Substrate:** [Substrate](#) is not necessary, but if you use it, you can use sand, large gravel, or silt.

**Diet/Feeding:** Musk turtle hatchlings are entirely carnivorous, and adults are mostly so, but will eat some vegetation. Most [commercial turtle diets](#) will be appropriate for musk turtles. Allow the food to sink to the bottom and remain there for a few days before you clean the tank so your turtle can forage. Adult Musk turtles should be fed every two to three days and juveniles every day or every other day.

**Behavior/Interaction:** Musk turtles are generally shy and not aggressive, though they may bite when first caught. Once they are acclimated to their new environment, they are fairly easy to handle.

**Interesting Facts:** When stressed, Musk turtles will release a pungent yellowish fluid from glands under the rim of their carapace. This is where their name is derived from. Most will lose this habit quickly once they have become acclimated to their home.