Terrariums, How to Clean

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

One aspect of reptile care and husbandry that deserves particular attention is cage maintenance. Because reptiles are susceptible to bacterial infections of the skin and digestive tract, cages and housing must be cleaned thoroughly and regularly. Routine cage maintenance is necessary to keep a safe and healthy home for your herp as well as an attractive showplace that is enjoyable and odor-free.

Certain precautions need to be taken during cleaning since the fecal matter of reptiles may harbor harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella*. It is most commonly transmitted to humans through oral ingestion after handling a herp or contaminated equipment, through open cuts or sores during handling, or through contact with contaminated soil or environmental items. For this reason, your reptile's cage, furnishings, and cleaning equipment need to be cleaned regularly and periodically disinfected.

Wear protective gloves during maintenance and wash your hands thoroughly with hot, soapy water after handling reptiles, reptile cages and equipment, and the stool of reptiles.

Clean Cage Accessories

Before introducing natural items such as rocks and branches into your reptile's home, make sure they are sterile. Rocks should be thoroughly cleaned and then boiled in water for 30 minutes. Sand can be rinsed with large amounts of water to remove any particulate matter and then heated in an oven at 200-250°F for 30 minutes. Branches should also be cleaned and heated in the same manner.

Cleaning Schedule

The frequency and degree of routine cage cleaning will vary from species to species depending on the size and habits of your herp. Always read and learn as much as possible regarding the needs and preferences of your herp, and tailor your cleaning schedule around the needs of your particular pet. For example, cages of large iguanas require more work than those of a snake. As you become more familiar with the needs of your pet, you may have to alter your cleaning schedule as needed. However, in general, you will need to:

- Perform daily cleaning to remove spills, uneaten food, shed skin, and other waste materials. Clean and disinfect food and water dishes daily when providing fresh food and water.
- Clean and disinfect the entire cage, substrate, and decorations weekly.

The use of rubber or latex gloves and protective goggles are recommended during cleaning. Wash your hands thoroughly after every contact with your herp and every cleaning procedure, no matter how brief, to avoid transmission of harmful bacteria. Use a hand sanitizer or antibacterial soap to further minimize any risk.

Routine Daily Cleaning

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

As part of your daily cleaning routine, you should remove feces and any uneaten food. Wipe up water spills and urates. If you are using a sand substrate, you can use a Shovel Scooper to clean and extend the use of the sand substrate.

If the inside of the cage has stubborn material that requires a cleaning solution, remove and temporarily relocate your herp to a clean spare cage. Clean, rinse very well, and wait until the cage is completely dry before returning your pet.

Wash food and water dishes in hot soapy water and dry thoroughly. Use a disinfectant or antibacterial soap to sanitize. Be sure to rinse thoroughly, leaving no trace of soap or disinfectant behind. To make the cleaning process more efficient, consider having two or more sets of dishes. By doing so, you can quickly and easily replace one set while the other is being cleaned.

Routine Weekly Cleaning

Temporarily relocate your herp to a clean spare cage while cleaning the main cage. Start by removing all decorations in the cage. Bag and discard disposable substrate.

Loosen hardened material with a commercial herp-safe cleaner, a toothbrush or other applicable tools from your special tool kit. Thoroughly clean all cage surfaces with hot soapy water and rinse and dry well.

Wash all decorations, food/water dishes and non-disposable substrate such as indoor/outdoor carpet with hot soapy water. Scrub with brushes to remove wastes and dried liquids, and rinse well.

After the entire cage and all accessories are cleaned and thoroughly rinsed, sanitize them by using a disinfectant. Then, rinse the cage, accessories, and decorations with hot water, to remove any residues.

Air dry all items completely before putting everything back together. Re-install everything when completely dry. Replace natural wood or any decoration that will not dry easily with easier to clean artificial decorations.

If bathing is recommended for your herp, it's a good idea to bathe your herp before introducing him into his clean, dry, and odor-free cage.

After cleaning your reptile cage, always remember to thoroughly clean and disinfect all the cleaning items you used, including the sink. Don't forget to wash your hands as well. By taking proper precautions, you can create an environment that is safe for both you and your pet reptile.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*