

Bearded Dragon Habitats, How to Create

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Your Bearded Dragon has unique requirements to stay healthy and happy. The following tips can help you provide your pet with a proper, hospitable home.

Enclosure/Cage

An appropriately sized aquarium with a tight-fitting [lid](#) will make a wonderful home for your Bearded Dragon. Hatchlings may be kept in a 10-15 gallon aquarium; adults require at least a 55-60 gallon aquarium. Wire cages are not ideal enclosures, because they do not retain heat and also can cause foot and nose trauma. If you must use a wire cage, make sure the wire is coated with plastic to lessen the possibility of injury.

Cages should be simple in design to facilitate easy, thorough cleaning. If you use a cage made of wood, seal it with polyurethane or a similar waterproofing agent, and caulk joints to enable cleaning and disinfection. Allow polyurethane or other sealant to dry several days, and air the cage out thoroughly prior to putting your pet in it to prevent toxicity.

The [substrate](#) lining the bottom of your Dragon's cage should be aesthetically pleasing, easy to clean, absorbent, and digestible if swallowed. Substrate can be flat newspaper, sheets of brown wrapping paper (the kind that comes in rolls), AstroTurf, or indoor/outdoor carpet. Do **NOT** use cedar shavings, gravel, crushed corn cob, kitty litter, wood shavings, or potting soil that contains vermiculite, pesticides, fertilizer, or wetting agents.

Landscaping, "Furniture," and Plants

Your Bearded Dragon will enjoy an assortment of branches for climbing and basking. Make sure branches are secure, of various sizes, and free of pitch and sap - oak works very well. The branches should be at least as wide as your Bearded Dragon to ensure your pet's comfort and safety. Boards covered with indoor/outdoor carpet also make good climbing posts. Flat-bottomed, smooth rocks

are also a welcome addition to your dragon's habitat, because they can help wear down toenails, which in captivity, must be clipped often. Your dragon will also enjoy having a place to hide. Whether you use an empty cardboard box, cardboard tube, or flower pot, the hiding place should provide a snug fit and should be located high in the enclosure. If your Bearded Dragon does not use its hiding place, try a different one or move it to a different location within the enclosure.

Plants are a beneficial addition to your dragon's home. In addition to providing humidity, shade, and a sense of security, they also beautify the enclosure. Be sure the plants you choose are nontoxic. Dracaena, Ficus benjamina, and hibiscus are all good choices. Be sure the plants have not been treated with pesticides and the potting soil does not contain vermiculite, pesticides, fertilizer, or wetting agents. Wash real plants with a water spray and water them thoroughly several times to the point where water runs out of the bottom of the pot to help remove any toxic chemicals that may be present. It's also a good idea to keep new live plants in a different part of your house for a while before putting them in your dragon's enclosure.

Temperature

Because your Bearded Dragon is a cold-blooded animal from arid woodland and desert environments, he requires supplemental heat for proper digestion. Keep your dragon's enclosure at 78-88°F during the day and in the 70s at night. If your Dragon is cold, he cannot properly digest his food and is increasingly prone to illness. Lizards like a temperature gradient, so if they are cold, they can move to a warmer part of the cage and vice versa. Place 2 [thermometers](#) in the enclosure, one at the basking level and one closer to the floor of the enclosure.

Secondary heat source: A secondary heat source creates additional heat in specific areas of the enclosure to provide your Dragon with an essential temperature gradient. To best supply this gradient, the secondary heat source should cover only 25-30% of the enclosure's surface. For adult Dragons, the secondary heat source could be a 30-75 watt incandescent bulb in a ceramic base, securely mounted where the animal cannot touch it. Special "[basking lights](#)" are also ideal. Either type of light should shine down on a particular basking area from outside the cage. The temperature under the light in the basking area should be 90-100°F. Hatchlings housed in smaller aquariums will require lights of lower wattage, or the aquarium temperature may become too warm very quickly.

Primary heat source: A primary heat source is necessary to keep the temperature of the entire enclosure within the proper range. A series of incandescent lights over the cage is one of the best heat sources. At night, these lights will need to be turned off and another heat source may be needed depending on the ambient temperature. A [heating pad](#) placed under the cage or [nocturnal reptile incandescent light bulbs](#) which produce heat, but little visible light, can be used. For larger enclosures, a space heater or separate room thermostat can be used to keep the room at the appropriate temperature. Be sure to place smoke detectors/fire alarms in rooms

with lights or other artificial heat sources.

Light

Your Bearded Dragon requires different types of light to maintain good health.

Visible white light: In addition to heat, incandescent bulbs also provide visible white light. A combination of fluorescent and incandescent [light fixtures](#) can be used to provide visible light to all areas of the enclosure.

Ultraviolet light: In addition to heat and white light, your Bearded Dragon must have access to natural sunlight for good health - it requires a certain spectrum of ultraviolet (UV) light called UVB. UVB is necessary for your Bearded Dragon to make Vitamin D. No artificial light is as good as natural sunlight when it comes to providing UVB, so when the outside temperature on a sunny day is over 70°F, place your Bearded Dragon outside in a secure screen or wire cage with a locking door. Provide some shade and a hiding place within the enclosure. UV rays do not penetrate window glass so Bearded Dragons placed in a sunny window will not receive UV light.

If you cannot provide your Bearded Dragon with easy access to bright sunlight, use a special light to provide the necessary [UVB light](#). Fish/aquarium and plant "grow" lights, either incandescent or fluorescent, are not sufficient, since they do NOT produce UVB. You will need a light that emits light in the 290-320 nanometer range. Lights producing only UVB, and lights that produce a combination of UVB and white lights are available. Replace UVB light sources every 6 months.

Remember, since UV light cannot penetrate glass, the top of your dragon's enclosure must be a relatively wide wire mesh (not so tightly woven that the mesh blocks light) when you use overhead UVB light sources. Ideally, place the UVB light source no more than 18 inches from the spot where your dragon spends most of his time; 10"-12" is optimal.

The areas illuminated by the incandescent basking light and the UV light should overlap. If your Bearded Dragon spends almost all his time basking under the incandescent light, while the UV light is at the other end of the cage, the UV light will offer no benefits.

Water and Humidity

Although your Bearded Dragon will receive most of his water from his [food](#), fresh drinking water should be available at all times in a [shallow bowl](#) that cannot be tipped over. Water in your dragon's

Glass enclosures, even those with a screen top, should NEVER be used when providing access to natural sunlight. Glass cages will trap heat and can cause fatally high temperatures.

Second to the sun, the best light source is a combination of visible light from fluorescent or incandescent lights, and UVB light from special reptile lights or combination lights.

environment is also a requirement, since proper humidity is necessary for proper shedding. When humidity is low (especially during winter months), mist your Bearded Dragon with water several times a week. Your dragon may also enjoy soaking in a tub of water; however, be sure the water tub allows easy entrance and exit. You will need to clean your dragon's tub and replace the water regularly, since your dragon may urinate or defecate in the water. In fact, water usually stimulates elimination, so immersing your dragon in water is a part of the treatment for constipation.

Sanitation

[Clean](#) your dragon's cage, food bowl, and water bowl routinely with a specially formulated sanitation product or a solution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water. Rinse all items thoroughly after cleaning and allow them to dry thoroughly before reassembling the cage and introducing your Bearded Dragon. Since your dragon can harbor the bacteria *Salmonella*, wash and sanitize your hands thoroughly after handling your pet or his cage (this is a good idea even if you wear rubber gloves during cleaning).

Housing More Than One Dragon

Reptiles are instinctively territorial and may fight when caged together. A male and female Bearded Dragon can generally be kept together; however, the male may become extremely aggressive during the breeding season and require removal. Also be aware that larger Bearded Dragons may keep smaller cage mates away from food and heat sources, and may even see them as an appetizer. If you plan to house Bearded Dragons together, use a larger cage to decrease the possibility of aggression and monitor your dragons closely.