Green Iguana

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Often called "Giant Green Iguana," Green Iguanas can grow up to 6 ft long and live up to 20 years or more. Since Green Iguanas come from exotic, tropical lands, they require very specific housing, food, light, and other care requirements. Without these absolute requirements they will be unable to thrive in captivity. It's critical to take all of these factors into consideration when deciding whether or not a Green Iguana is the right pet for you.

Species Profile Green Iguana	
Scientific Name:	*Iguana iguana*
Natural Environment:	Throughout Central and South America, from Sinaloa and Veracruz, Mexico, south to the Tropic of Capricorn in Paraguay and southeast Brazil, as well as many islands throughout the Caribbean region and the coastal eastern Pacific.
Average Size:	They usually weigh about 10-15 lbs and grow to be 4-6 ft long.
Average Life Span:	15-20 years.
Appearance:	Contrary to popular belief, not all iguanas are green. Most juveniles are bright green, but as they age and grow they can range in color from dull green to brown or even orange with striped tails. The color of a Green Iguana may vary based upon his mood, temperature, health, or social status. Other distinguishing features include a dewlap (loose skin hanging from neck), comb-like spines from his neck to the last third of the tail, and a long tapering tail.

Habitat

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Lighting: Ultraviolet lighting providing UVB and UVA is required. Without proper UVB lighting they can develop metabolic bone disease, which can be fatal if not treated. Iguanas must have a day/night cycle, so shut your iguana's lights off at night for 12-13 hours.

Temperature: 80º-85ºF by day with a basking spot of 90º-95ºF. 75º-80ºF by night.

Humidity: 65-75%.

Housing: The enclosure should be at least 6 ft tall, about 1-1/2 to twice the length of the iguana, and 2/3 to one full length of the iguana wide. The bigger the cage, the better off your iguana will be. Iguanas are arboreal (tree climbing) and feel most comfortable up high. Therefore, it is imperative to provide sufficient branches and shelves for climbing and lounging. It is also important to not use any particulate substrates such as wood chips, dirt or sand because iguanas often tongue lick their surroundings. Anything that sticks to the tongue will most likely be ingested, including indigestible substances that can cause impaction of the digestive tract. Even though iguanas do not drink often, it is important to always provide them with fresh drinking water. In addition, you may want to provide your iguana with a shallow tub of water in which he can soak. Many iguanas enjoy soaking, and it not only encourages them to drink, but also aids in shedding. It is sometimes helpful to design a habitat that includes a hiding spot or two.

Diet/Feeding: Iguanas are strict herbivores. A well-balanced iguana diet will consist of about 40-45% greens, 40-45% other vegetables, 10% or less of fruits, and less than 5% of other grains or commercial diets. Provide a multi-vitamin supplement and a calcium supplement based on your iguana's age and health status. One of the most important factors in providing a well balanced diet is maintaining a calcium to phosphorus (Ca:P) ratio of about 2 to 1. This is critical in order for the bones to properly grow and remain strong.

Behavior/Interaction: Green Iguanas are diurnal, meaning they are awake during the day. When frightened, an iguana will usually freeze or hide. Like many other lizards, iguanas can autotomize, or drop off part of their tail. This gives them a chance to escape before their predator figures out what is going on. A new tail will sprout from the autotomized spot and regrow within a year, though not to the length it was before. These animals are known to use visual signals, such as head bobbing and dewlap extension, as

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means of communicating with rivals. In extreme cases, physical contact is involved in altercations. In addition, males scent-mark females as well as branches. Hissing, which is a form of auditory communication, sometimes occurs.

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