

Argentine Black & White Tegu

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Also known as the "Giant Tegu," the Argentine Black & White Tegu is the largest species of tegu. Intelligent and curious, they make wonderful pets that are fun to interact with. Because they are so friendly, they are one of the easiest tegus to handle when tamed.

Species Profile: Argentine Black & White Tegu

Scientific Name: *Tupinambis merianae*

Natural Environment: Argentina.

Average Size: 3 feet to 4-1/2 feet.

Average Life Span: 15 to 20 years (in captivity).

Appearance: The Argentine Black & White Tegu has beaded skin and two lines of yellow dots running down its back from its neck to the beginning of its tail. It has two loreal scales (scale between eye and nostril scales). Young Argentine Tegus are green with black markings, and the green eventually fades to white over the first few months of its life. Males are significantly larger than females and have been known to grow up to 4-1/2 ft in length, whereas females generally aren't longer than 3 ft. Males are also thick and more muscular in build.

Habitat

Size: No less than 6 ft x 2 ft for one male. One female's enclosure can be slightly smaller. A pair need at least 6 ft x 3-4 ft.

Lighting:	There are a variety of lights that you can use in your tegu's habitat. A basking lamp , full spectrum UV light, and day heat bulbs should be used during daylight hours. At night, you may need to use a nocturnal (red or black) heat bulb to maintain temperatures.
Temperature:	80° to 90°F during the day with a basking area of 95° to 100°F. Nighttime temperatures should be about 5° to 10°F cooler. You can use under tank heating pads , day and night heat bulbs, and ceramic heat emitters to maintain proper temperatures throughout the enclosure. Monitor temperatures with two thermometers , one at each end of the habitat.
Humidity:	60% to 80%; to maintain humidity levels, mist the enclosure regularly and use substrates that hold moisture. Monitor humidity levels with a hygrometer to make sure they are in the correct range. Humidity levels that are too low will cause shedding problems.
Housing:	<p>Because Argentine Black & White Tegus are very active, their habitats need to be as large as possible. You may even want to consider a closet or room sized enclosure, and you will definitely have to build your own habitat rather than purchase one. The enclosure should be secure and well-ventilated. If you live in a climate that is comparable to their natural environment, you can house them outdoors once they are fully grown.</p> <p>Tegus tend to rearrange their habitat the way they want it, so you only need minimal decorations. Place a few hide spots (half logs, cork bark slabs, etc) throughout the cage to provide your tegu with a sense of security. Add a few rocks, possibly a couple plants, and a large sturdy water bowl big enough for your tegu to submerge itself. Any accessories more than this are fairly unnecessary and will just reduce the amount of room your tegu has to move about its habitat and dig in its substrate.</p> <p>To promote proper shedding, at least one of the hides should be turned into a "high humidity" hide. Stuff it with damp sphagnum moss or another moist substrate, and check it regularly to make sure the substrate is moist enough and clean.</p>

Substrate: Orchid bark, cypress mulch, [coconut husk products](#), and other substrates that hold moisture. The substrate should be something that your tegu can dig in, so avoid carpet or paper. It should be at least 6" deep in the bottom of the enclosure to allow for burrowing.

Diet/Feeding: Argentine Black & White Tegus are omnivores, and their diet should consist of appropriately sized insects - including [crickets](#), [mealworms](#), [waxworms](#), and roaches - meat, and high calcium fruits. Avoid feeding them adult rodents regularly; they cannot digest large quantities of fur. All food should be dusted with a [reptile calcium supplement](#) regularly and a vitamin supplement approximately once a week.

We recommend that you always use a bowl when feeding your tegu. Feeding them from your hand can become confusing for them, and it can encourage food aggression that results in them accidentally biting you when going for food.

Behavior/Interaction: Argentine Black & White Tegus are generally calm and easy to handle. They enjoy interacting with humans and can become very attached to their owners. The younger your tegu is when you start handling it, the more it will bond with you and the better it will respond to regular handling.

These tegus can be kept in groups, and in the wild they actually hibernate in larger groups. However, in captivity, we recommend that you have groups no larger than three unless you have a large outdoor enclosure. There should be only one male per group to prevent fighting.

Interesting Facts: Argentine Black & White Tegus live in a wide range of climates in Argentina; they can be found both in tropical areas and temperate areas that have cold winters. During cold weather, these tegus will hibernate, generally for about six months from September to March. Though they are terrestrial, Argentine Tegus are excellent swimmers that can stay underwater for long periods of time.