Cooling Your Reptile

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Heating needs for your herp will change from season to season as the ambient temperature in your house changes. Heating devices and lighting systems that work to create the proper temperature during cooler months may produce too much heat for warmer summer months. The following information will help you to recognize that the enclosure is too warm and to adjust habitat temperatures accordingly.

POTR & Signs of Heat Stress

All reptiles have what is known as a "POTR" - a preferred optimum temperature range. There is a narrow margin on either side of this that can be tolerated for short periods of time. Temperatures that fall outside of these areas cause serious stress and will eventually cause death.

Signs that your herp's habitat is too warm include:

- Avoiding basking area
- Staying in the shade
- Panting
- Burrowing into the substrate or the other coolest places in the enclosure
- Lethargy
- Lack of appetite

Aestivation

In the wild, many herps will spend the summer "aestivating." Aestivation refers to dormancy and inactivity during hot summer months. There is lower metabolic activity, and aestivating reptiles are sluggish. However, though this is perfectly natural in their native environment, there is no need for that in pet herps. You control their environmental conditions, and they should not have to aestivate to deal with hot weather. It is up to you to properly cool their habitat.

Tips for Cooling Herps

There are several things that you can do to keep your herp's enclosure cooler during warm periods:

- Move the enclosure to the coolest part of the house.
- Increase the air circulation in the enclosure by adding ventilation holes in the sides or top that you can cover up during cooler months. Be sure the holes are still small enough to avoid any escape of your herp or risk that your herp could get trapped in the hole.
- Reduce supplemental heating by turning off some devices or removing them completely.
- Use a rheostat to decrease the power going to the heating devices so they put out less heat.
- Use timers to control heat lamps and sources of light that also produce heat.
- Use a cooling fan to increase air movement and dissipate unwanted heat from lighting equipment. This is especially helpful because it allows you to maintain the same lighting but minimizes the effect it has on the habitat temperature.Do not position the fan to blow directly on your herp.
- Use a mister to moisten the reptile and his habitat to keep him cool during periods of dry heat.
- Provide at least one or two moist hideouts filled with damp sphagnum moss. These hideouts will stay cooler than dry ones as long as you moisten the moss periodically.
- Provide a shallow bowl for soaking.
- Make sure the enclosure is large enough to provide the proper temperature gradients. Terrariums that are too small

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will not allow enough of a difference between the hot end and the cool end.
- Provide rocky crevices or underground burrows for those reptiles that spend most of their time on the ground.

Always monitor habitat temperatures with at least one thermometer. We recommend the use of two or more in different parts of the temperature gradient to make sure that you provide the proper temperature range for your herp. Be especially careful to monitor temperatures closely during spring and other changing seasons when the habitat may start to warm up slightly. Even a few degrees can make a difference for your herp!

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