Housing Multiple Reptiles of the Same Species

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Pet owners who are used to having dogs, cats, and other animals may find it hard to understand that reptiles don't actually need "friends." They are not social animals, and in fact, most are solitary by nature. If they are going to want interaction of any kind, it is generally with their owner. Situations that involve reptiles of the same species coming together in the wild generally involve mating or a larger one eating a smaller one.

Though they are more likely to view each other as just another part of the environment rather than a companion to play with, it is possible in some cases, to house multiples reptiles from the same species in one enclosure. However, there are certain things you will need to take into consideration first.

Size of the Enclosure

Housing multiple herps is not as simple as just adding another reptile to the enclosure. For some species, multiple animals cannot coexist no matter how large the enclosure. Two or more compatible reptiles of any species are going to require a larger habitat, especially if the animals themselves are large. Smaller animals, such as newts, may only require that you upgrade from a 10 gallon to a 20-gallon terrarium. However, large species, such as Red-eared Sliders, will need a substantially larger terrarium than they already have if you want to house more than one. Keep in mind also that some reptiles will start out very small, but by the time they reach adulthood, even an enclosure for one is going to be very large. Will you have room to provide a habitat big enough to house two large reptiles?

Providing a large enough enclosure is important for a couple of reasons. First, you must have enough room to place multiple hiding spots around the habitat. These can include hide boxes, plants, rocks, or anything else that will create a sightline break and a sense of isolation and security for the reptiles. The basking and water areas must be large enough to accommodate all of the reptiles at once.

Second, you must make sure that the size of the enclosure allows the reptiles to avoid each other if they want to. Because reptiles are generally solitary animals,

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being forced to constantly interact with other reptiles is going to put an inordinate amount of stress on them, which will make them more susceptible to infection and disease.

Size of the Reptiles

You will have to consider the size of the reptiles themselves as well. Only reptiles of approximately the same size should be housed together. Even though they are the same species, housing a larger reptile with a smaller reptile can result in cannibalism if they are carnivores or omnivores. If they are herbivores, the larger can keep the smaller away from food and water.

A major difference in size can also lead to fights for superiority and dominance within the enclosure. The larger reptile can use its size to claim the best basking spot, the best hide spot, and anything else it wants. The smaller one can become extremely stressed from the constant battle to get enough food, space, and time in the basking area. The high levels of stress can result in a lack of appetite, anorexia, weakness, illness, and possibly even death.

Gender

Gender should also play a part in your decision. Females are generally less territorial than males, and if you are going to house multiple herps in the same enclosure, we highly recommend that you have no more than one male per habitat. Males will often try to establish themselves as the dominant reptile in the enclosure by attacking other males or blocking them from food, water, and basking areas. You should in most cases, have groups of all females or one male with multiple females.

However, even if there is only one male in the group, there are still issues that can arise. Mating behavior is a concern, as it can be stressful for the female if the male is constantly trying to mate with her. It can also result in unwanted offspring that you don't have the space or finances to care for. Plus, males have also been known to act territorial and aggressive towards females as well as other males. This is why for most species of reptiles your safest choice is a female, single sex group.

Adding Accessories to a Multi-Herp Habitat

Having additional herps in an enclosure means that you will need to provide more of everything. You will need to add additional hide spots, enlarge the basking area or add another one, create sightline breaks with rocks, plants, and other items, and more. If the species is aquatic or semi-aquatic, you may need a larger water area. If it is arboreal, you will need to add more items for climbing and perching. You will almost definitely have to upgrade to a larger terrarium to be able to add all of the accessories you will need.

How to Put Two Herps Together

If you are not bringing the two herps home at the same time, you will need to introduce them in a neutral area. The worst thing you could do would be to simply

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put the new herp into the old herp's enclosure.

Once they have had a chance to meet each other outside the habitat, put the new herp into the habitat. After it has a chance to explore the enclosure and figure out where everything is, put the old herp back in with it. Watch them closely for the next several hours, and separate them immediately if you see any signs of outright aggression.

You will also need to monitor them over the next several weeks and months for any signs of dominance (antagonistic behavior). Attempts to dominate another herp can be obvious or subtle.

Obvious attempts at dominance include:

- Chasing
- Attacking
- Aggressive posturing or displays
- Keeping the other herp away from food, water, and basking areas

More subtle signs may include:

- Glaring
- Minor shifting in position when other herp approaches

If you see these signs or one herp is showing signs of stress or illness, separate them immediately.

Because there is always a chance that issues may arise, you **must** have a backup plan in place before bringing the new herp home. Have a terrarium and all the supplies you would need to create a second habitat. If they aren't getting along, it can be dangerous to continue housing them together. One or both herps could get injured, fall ill, or even die. Always keep in mind that prolonged exposure to sources of stress is going to compromise a reptile's immune system, and if you suspect that one is stressed, rectify the situation right away.

Reptiles That Can Be Housed Together

Most reptiles can be housed with another member of their species. The following species are some of the herps that can be kept in pairs or groups:

- Fire-bellied Newts
- Bearded Dragons
- Leopard Geckos
- Greek Tortoises
- Russian Tortoises
- Chinese Fire-bellied Toads
- Red-eared Sliders
- Box Turtles
- Anoles
- Green Iguanas
- Water Dragons

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However, just because some of the above reptiles can be housed together does not mean that they should be! For example, the sheer size of Red-eared Sliders and Green Iguanas will make housing two of them together very difficult. Male Russian Tortoises are very territorial and aggressive, even towards females. Male Bearded Dragons and male Leopard Geckos are also very territorial, so you should only have one. It is also recommended to only have one male Anole.

Additionally, just because the species as a whole can tolerate another reptile in their habitats doesn't mean that every reptile will. Reptiles, like other animals, have their own individual demeanors. The fact that the last Bearded Dragon you had did not mind being housed with another Dragon doesn't mean that your next one will as well. There are no absolutes when it comes to knowing whether or not your reptile will tolerate sharing its living space.

In Conclusion

Before you bring home a "friend" for your reptile, carefully consider if you are able to provide everything a multi-herp habitat requires. Research the species or check with your veterinarian to make sure that your species is not strictly solitary. Always keep in mind that there is a possibility it will not work out, and have a backup plan in place. If you have any doubts or concerns as to whether or not it can be done, stick to a single herp enclosure. You aren't depriving your reptile of anything, and it will probably be easier on both of you in the long run.

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