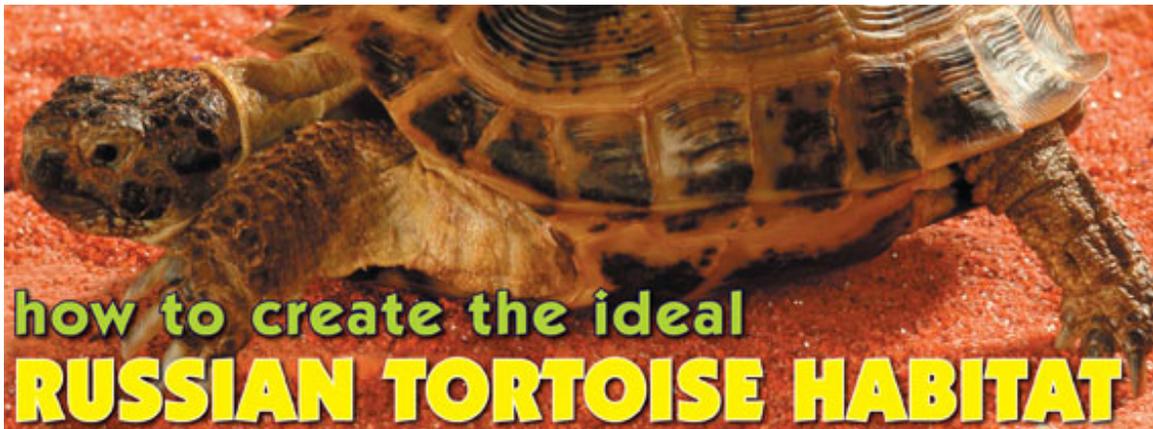


Russian Tortoise Habitats, How to Create

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Russian Tortoises are native to dry, arid regions, and there are a number of habitat requirements that are necessary to create a safe and healthy environment for them. The following tips will help you to put together and maintain the right habitat for your Russian Tortoise.

Enclosure

In many areas of the country, Russian Tortoises can be kept outside for some or all of the year, while in other, cooler areas, they can only be kept outside during warmer months. Therefore, we will discuss how to set up both indoor and outdoor enclosures in this article.

Indoor enclosures are necessary for hatchlings and juvenile Russian Tortoises as well as in areas where it is too cold outside for them to be kept year round. Terrariums can be made from glass or plastic. Glass can also make it difficult to maintain the proper humidity. Additionally, Russian Tortoises will often try to walk through glass enclosures because they don't understand that they can't get out. If you do use a glass terrarium, be sure to use paint or tape around the bottom 5" to 6" of the enclosure.

The size of the terrarium should be proportional to the size of the tortoise. A good rule to go by is that it should be 10 times as long as the tortoise's length, 5 times as wide as the tortoise's width, and 3 times as high as the tortoise's length. The minimum size should be 2 feet by 4 feet. A 50 gallon terrarium or clear plastic storage container works well. If you start out with a smaller enclosure, be prepared to upgrade to a larger one as your tortoise grows.

Outdoor enclosures will also need to be large, and you can put your tortoise in it as long as the temperature is 40° F or higher. The enclosure should be at least 6 feet by 10 feet for one to six tortoises, and it must be secure. Because Russian Tortoises can dig tunnels, the walls should extend at least 8" to 10" underground. They are also good climbers, so the sides of the enclosure must be at least 16" high. An

outdoor enclosure should be situated in an area where it will get plenty of sun, is generally dry, and has good drainage for when it does rain.

Even if you house your Russian Tortoise inside for most of the year, you should still set up an outdoor pen. Just three hours outside each day during warmer months can have significant health benefits.

Substrate can be a mixture of [sand](#) and garden soil, [coconut fiber](#), or [peat moss](#), and it should be deep enough that your tortoise can burrow into it. Although Russian Tortoises live in arid regions, they commonly burrow, which provides an environment that is more humid. Be sure to prevent substrate from completely drying out and avoid using dusty substrates.

Landscaping & Cage Accessories

There are a number of items that your tortoise will need in its enclosure. Place a shallow water dish in one end for your tortoise to soak in. This should be deep enough that it can wet a good portion of its shell, but not so deep that it can drown. A hide box should be located in the cool end, at the opposite end of the enclosure from the basking area. The hide box should be sturdy, as Russian Tortoises are unintentionally destructive to flimsy decorations and shelters. Half logs or wooden boxes work well.

Other items that can be placed in the enclosure include rocks, logs, and tunnels that your tortoise can climb on, in, and under, but take care not to clutter the terrarium. Russian Tortoises need plenty of room to move around.

Temperature

The basking area should be the warmest spot in the cage with a temperature of approximately 90° to 95° F. The temperature gradients throughout the cage should go from the warmest spot of the basking area to the low 70s at the opposite end. At night, the temperatures should lower into the 60s. Daytime and nighttime temperatures should be monitored with a [thermometer](#).

Primary heat sources, which are sources used to maintain the ambient temperature in the terrarium, can include ceramic emitters and [under tank heaters](#). Do not use heat rocks in the enclosure. Secondary heat sources, or heat sources used to create warmer areas such as the basking area, can include [incandescent heat lamps](#) or [infrared bulbs](#). The combination of heat sources you choose to use depends on the size and type of the enclosure and the overall temperatures in your home.

Light

Tortoises need approximately 12 hours of light followed by 12 hours of darkness. You must use a [full spectrum fluorescent light with UVB light](#) over your tortoise's terrarium for 12 to 14 hours (depending on the season) every day. UVB light encourages proper Vitamin D3 synthesis, and it helps with proper skeletal and shell development.

Additional light should come from a [100 watt incandescent basking spot lamp](#) over the basking area. This should be turned off at night. You can use red bulbs at night, but it is not necessary.

Humidity

Proper humidity levels are very important to the overall health of your Russian Tortoise. Because they are native to an arid climate, they need relatively low humidity, so levels should be no higher than 60%.

You may have heard that humidity isn't that important because Russian Tortoises are very adaptable. Though some may be able to deal with a slightly higher humidity, 60% is the best level for optimum health. Russian Tortoises have little tolerance for cold, wet, or humid conditions, and constant exposure to those types of environments can cause a number of health issues, including pneumonia, shell rot, and eye infections. Just as excess humidity can cause problems, low humidity can cause severe medical problems. Therefore, it is best to keep humidity levels around 60% and monitor them with a [hygrometer](#).

Cleaning

Change the water in the shallow dish and spot clean the enclosure daily. A full cleaning should be done with a 5% bleach solution regularly, no less than once every couple weeks. Be sure to rinse everything thoroughly before placing the substrate back in the terrarium so all traces of bleach are removed. Always wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning your tortoise's enclosure.

Housing More than One Russian Tortoise

Russian Tortoises cannot be housed with other species, as they will be aggressive towards them. They are also aggressive to their own species, and more than one male should never be kept in the same terrarium. If you are going to keep more than one Russian Tortoise, make sure that there is only one male per enclosure.

Purchase or set up a very large habitat to give all the tortoises plenty of room, and use sightline breaks to provide them with hiding places and a sense of isolation. Sightline breaks can include plants, piles of rocks, and wooden shelters like hide boxes. Improperly setup habitats for multiple Russian Tortoises can result in the male damaging the females.