

Feeding Recommendations for Turtles & Tortoises

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When a turtle or tortoise owner brings a sick animal to the veterinarian, the cause of illness can almost always be traced back to one of two causes, improper housing or improper nutrition. There are a wide variety of commercially prepared foods available, but they are often nutritionally inadequate for many species. The diet of turtles and tortoises should be varied. When feeding commercially available prepared [foods](#), they should be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables or other food items based on the specific dietary needs of your pet.

Provide good, basic nutrition by recreating their natural diet and living conditions as closely as possible. To do this, we have to know as much as we can about their eating habits, preferences, and nutritional requirements in the wild. Every turtle or tortoise owner should purchase a professionally-written reference book about their specific species of turtle/tortoise and follow the particular feeding/housing guidelines closely.

There are hundreds of different species of turtles and tortoises, each with different nutritional requirements. The following recommendations are rough guidelines for maintaining good health in your pet.

Herbivore, omnivore, or carnivore?

To provide a nutritional diet, you must first determine if your turtle or tortoise is an herbivore, an omnivore, or a carnivore. Knowing what they eat and providing the right foods ensures your pet is receiving the proper nutrients in appropriate quantities for healthy growth.

Species	Diet
Tortoise	Tortoises are almost always exclusively herbivores . Their diets usually consist of 100% plant origin. While some feeding programs call for the addition of some animal protein to their diet, this is controversial and unnecessary if a good, balanced plant diet is fed.
Aquatic Turtle	Most aquatic turtles are primarily carnivores and, depending on the species and age, require a diet that contains from 65%-90% meat. The remaining 10%-35% is vegetable-based.

Semi Aquatic Turtle

Most semiaquatic turtles are **omnivores**, and their nutritional requirements are usually met with a diet that is 50% meat and 50% vegetable-based. Depending on the species, age, and their habitat, these percentages will vary slightly.

It is essential to know what your turtle's particular nutritional needs are. By learning what your turtle's or tortoise's normal diet is in the wild, you can tailor the following recipes even closer to simulate their natural diet.

Sample Diets

Herbivore Diet

Mixed Green Leaf Vegetable Base (85-90%)

- Coarse mixed grasses & hays
- Dandelion, mustard, and collard greens
- Cabbage*
- Clover leaves
- Kale*
- Endive
- Parsley*
- Carrot toppings
- Flower heads and other natural fodder plants

Vegetables (10-15%) - Fruit should be given very sparingly because overconsumption can lead to high levels of sugar in the gut (intestine) and result in colic.

- Green Beans
- Parsnips
- Peas
- Red and green sweet peppers
- Sweet Potatoes
- Winter Squash
- Apple (no seeds)
- Cantaloupe
- Grapes
- Mango (no pits)

***These contain high amounts of oxalates and should only be fed in limited quantities.**

Carnivore Diet

Meat Components (65%-90%*)

- Live feeder fish
- Earthworms, trout chow, or commercial turtle food (no more than 25% of diet)
- Frozen pinkie mice
- Snails and mollusks
- Dried commercial trout pellets

Vegetable Components (Approximately 35% or less depending upon the species*)

- Mustard, dandelion, or collard greens
- Grated carrot
- Clover
- Small quantity of fruit and other items listed in the herbivore diet

***Not all aquatic turtles are carnivores. Some species of aquatic tropical turtles require a diet rich in fruit, while others are almost completely herbivorous, so check on your individual species. Also, juveniles require more meat than adults.**

Omnivore Diet

Vegetable and Fruit Components (50-90%*)

- Green beans
- Berries and strawberries
- Endive
- Grated carrot
- Dandelion, mustard, or collard greens
- Winter squash
- Cantaloupe
- Flower heads

Meat Components (10-50%*)

- Live crickets
- Earthworms
- Trout pellets and commercial turtle foods
- Freshly molted mealworms
- Slugs and snails
- Small pinkie mice

***Proportions depend upon species. Also, in general, juvenile turtles require more meat than adults.**

These food items should always be fresh and supplemented with a good vitamin-calcium [supplement](#) approved for use in turtles and tortoises.

Make sure your turtle or tortoise eats properly by providing clean, fresh water and a stress-free environment in addition to a proper diet. Different tortoises and turtles will demonstrate preferences for certain foods. There is no harm in catering to these preferences to some extent as long as they are healthy and these preferences do not turn habitual. Even healthful food items can lead to unbalanced or poor nutrition if it is the only item being eaten. It's important to rotate and vary the diet as much as possible to avoid monotony and unbalanced nutrition.

Remember, nutrition is one of the most important aspects in maintaining a healthy and happy turtle or tortoise. By following these guidelines and researching your individual turtle's needs, you can provide an excellent diet for your pet.

