

# CAL ZOO'S REFERENCE SHEET

## RUSSIAN TORTOISES

Latin name	Testudo horsfieldi	Maximum length	10 inches
Native to	Russia, Ukraine & Pakistan	Approximate life span	Estimates claim over 100 years

### GENERAL INFORMATION

In many areas Russian Tortoises can make an interesting addition to a back yard. When kept outdoors, make sure an area with plenty of shade and soil is available for burrowing. If you are one of those people with the perfect garden, beware! These tortoises are excellent diggers with some burrows extending for 6.5 feet. The burrow will usually start at the edge of a lawn or planter bed. In extreme weather the tortoise will retreat into the burrow. If allowed to hibernate, tortoises will be most active in the Spring. Their small size and active nature make the Russian Tortoise a desirable animal to keep.

### ENCLOSURE

In some areas where the temperatures are not too extreme you may be able to keep Russian Tortoises outdoors year round. If Summer temperatures are under 90°f Russian Tortoises will do well outdoors. If Winter temperatures fall below 40°f your Tortoises should be moved indoors. If kept indoors a 20 gallon or larger aquarium will work to house a Russian Tortoise. Larger enclosures will allow your tortoise to get some much enjoyed exercise.

### SUBSTRATE

For bottom substrates there are a variety of choices. For any of them start with a layer of newspaper for easy clean up and extra absorption. On top of the paper use Zoo Med CAGE CARPET or layer of rabbit pellets or alfalfa. Rabbit pellets and fresh alfalfa help keep odor down, are inexpensive and provide another food source. Newspaper alone will work fine, but is a bit boring in appearance.

### TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY

Russian Tortoises prefer daytime temperatures of 75 - 85°f. Allow for a nighttime temperature drop to 60 - 75°f. Keep humidity very low. They occur in dry regions.

### HEATING

Reptiles need to be able to regulate their body temperature, so a temperature range must be provided. Use a Zoo Med REPTITHERM® UNDER TANK HEATER (U.T.H.). Leave it on 24 hours a day. UTH's take a few hours to reach their optimal temperature. For easy heat control, use a Zoo Med REPTI-TEMP™ RHEOSTAT in conjunction with the U.T.H.'s or rock heaters. They will also slightly help to increase the air temperature if needed. Always use at least one thermometer, two is optimal. One on the cooler side, one on the warmer side. A Zoo Med DELUXE ANALOG MIN/MAX THERMOMETER works great to show the high and low temperatures in a 24 hour period.

### LIGHTING

When kept indoors, use a Zoo Med REPTISUN™ fluorescent during the day. Allow a dark period for rest at night. All reptiles and amphibians need a photo period(light cycle). A plug in timer (for your lights only, do not use a timer for your heating devices) works well to develop a regular photo period of 12 hours light, and 12 hours dark. Reptiles and amphibians cannot see the red light spectrum so a low wattage red bulb is ideal for night time viewing of your Russian Tortoise.

### FOOD & WATER

Fresh, fibrous vegetables. Keep fruits to a minimum as the sugars tend to create digestive problems. Avoid meat based food items as long term health problems may occur. Provide a large, shallow water bowl with easy access. The water depth should be ½ the height of the Tortoise. Turtles and Tortoises use water for a variety things besides drinking. Water is also used to keep the eyes and nose clean, for waste elimination, and to help regulate body temperature. Change water at least every other day with fresh de-chlorinated water or spring water. Change more often if the water appears dirty. Your tortoises may need to be soaked from time to time. Soak in room temperature water just high enough to reach the top of their legs.

### NOTES

Always wash your hands before and immediately after handling reptiles and amphibians. Never leave live food long term with reptiles & amphibians. They can inflict severe harm, even kill your pet. If your animals take some time to eat or you feed them at night, leave a slice of potato, carrot or dry dog food for the live food items to eat. Your local pet shop is an ideal source for reptile and amphibian related books and supplies. Please make sure you read and become familiar with any instructions provided with reptile support products you may purchase. For further information on reptiles and amphibians we recommend you read *REPTILES MAGAZINE* and *THE VIVARIUM*. California Zoological Supply hopes you have enjoyed reading this reference sheet on Russian Tortoises. We hope that our guidelines will assist you with the care or possible purchase of your new pet.

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