

# Medusa Exotics

## CARE INFORMATION SHEET

### BEARDED DRAGON (*pogona vitticeps*)

This is an agamid lizard, its natural habitat is dry, rocky semi-desert, or open woodland. This species adapts well to captivity and responds well to human contact, making it one of the most popular pet lizards. Widely available in the UK and bred in captivity.

#### Housing

Bearded dragons require generous areas of space so consider a 3ft vivarium to be the absolute minimum, 4ft or larger would be better. Adult beardies will attempt to eat smaller animals so do not house youngsters with adults. Males can become territorial, if you are keeping a group, ensure that there is only one male to prevent fighting. A male with 2 or 3 females will live happily together, as will 2 or more females without a male, but you can also keep a single animal of either sex. A wooden vivarium is generally better than a glass one for this species, as it will retain heat more effectively. Substrate to cover the bottom of the vivarium can be in the form of desert sand or calci sand, this is quite easy to keep clean by using a sand scoop to remove faeces, and replace the entire substrate at regular intervals. Many keepers choose this as it looks more natural. Some keepers prefer to cover the bottom of the vivarium with rough-textured tiles, which is also easy to keep clean, and removes any possibility of the animal accidentally ingesting sand substrates. Provide a couple of rocky hides and maybe a branch or two for climbing, beardies like to bask close to the heat and light source. Keep the vivarium clean to safeguard your animal's health and to minimise unpleasant odour.

#### Temperature, lighting and humidity

It is of vital importance to provide a thermal gradient within the vivarium, like all reptiles bearded dragons are cold blooded and they need to maintain their body temperature by using the environment around them. You therefore need to provide a warm side and a cooler side to enable the dragon to regulate its temperature. The ideal is 30c at the hottest point and 25c at the coolest side, with a basking area between 33 – 37 degrees. At night time the temperature can be dropped to 22c – 25c. The equipment you need to use to achieve the correct temperatures will depend on the size and type of housing, please ask for advice when purchasing your set-up. You do not need to provide high levels of humidity. Bearded dragons require UVB lighting in order for them to metabolise vitamin D3, the light should be turned off at night, you can use a timer switch to control this. Our staff will be happy to advise you on the equipment you will need.

#### Feeding

Beardies are omnivores, with about 20% of their diet made up of plant matter, the rest should be protein in the form of a variety of live invertebrate prey, pinky mice can also be offered as the lizard grows. Always give smaller sized insect food to baby dragons, if you use large prey for babies they may suffer health problems including intestinal impaction, always go for the smallest you can get for a baby beardie. Even for adults you should avoid using adult sized locusts with wings. Suitable live prey includes crickets, locusts, cockroaches, mealworms, wax worms. Feed the insects before giving them to the lizard, this will increase the nutritional value and also the live food will last a little longer. Dust the insects 2 or 3 times a week with a vitamin supplement. (Our staff will advise you on suitable products.) Bearded dragons have a large appetite especially when young and will require daily feeding, and live food will be snapped up within seconds of being placed in the vivarium. Plant matter should be offered on a shallow feeding dish and can consist of shredded greens, thinly sliced squash, apple, parsley, carrot. Always provide a bowl of clean, fresh water. You may not see the lizard drink very often as their natural habitat is dry, but none the less water should be available to them.

## **General care advice**

Juveniles may be skittish and nervous to start with, but regular, brief and gentle handling will help them to become tame. It is unusual for these lizards to bite, they generally respond to human interaction quite well. As the animal becomes more used to being handled you will be more confident, and allowing your pet some time to explore the room under your supervision is the next step. Be gentle and patient and your efforts will soon be rewarded.

Beardies are robust and healthy provided they are cared for properly should have few health problems. You can expect a lifespan of 7 to 10 years. If you are concerned about your pet's health you should seek advice without delay from a vet who has experience of treating reptiles, do not wait until it is too late.

## **Breeding**

If you are keeping a male with females, breeding will occur. A sexually mature male will darken his beard, bob his head and stamp his feet during courtship of the female. Females can produce large clutches of eggs, maybe 15 or more. The female will require a snug secluded place to lay her eggs, so provide her with a box containing damp peat and/or moss, large enough for her to turn around and dig. You should carefully remove the eggs, handling and turning them as little as possible. The eggs should be placed in an incubator at around 27c – 28c, and will normally hatch after approx 60 -75 days. The young will begin to feed on small sized live prey within a few days of hatching.

Breeding will continue during the spring and summer months, females can breed several times during this period. However continual breeding can leave the females underweight and in poor condition, please be alert to this and allowing a weakened female some time alone to rest and regain condition is humane and will prolong her life.

Increased fertility can be encouraged by brumation just prior to the early spring breeding season, this is achieved by lowering the temperature and giving a shortened daylight period. The animals will slow down and will eat less at this time. After a few weeks gradually increase the daylight period and raise the temperature and breeding is likely to be successful.

If you have any concerns about your dragon please ask our staff, also we have a number of informative books available to purchase.