

Gulf Coast Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina major*)

Origins: The Gulf Coast Box Turtle originates from South-eastern United States. It ranges from north-western Florida to eastern Texas. The natural habitat is open woodland and marshy meadows, but always close to a water source.

Adult Size and Life Span: This is the largest four-toed box turtle and can exceed 20cm (8") in carapace (top shell) length. Its carapace is elongated with rear marginal scutes that flare strongly outward. These turtles are long-lived, many living beyond 100 years! Therefore, choosing a box turtle as a pet is a very serious commitment.

Diet and Feeding: These turtles are omnivorous.

Items to include in their diet are:

Mealworms	Strawberries
Crickets	Black berries
Earthworms	Blueberries
Snails	Other berries
Beetle grubs	Cantaloupe
Grasshoppers	Honey dew melons
Beetles	Musk melons
Moths	Corn
Sow/pill bugs	Turnip greens
Millipedes	Endive
Cooked shrimp/crawfish	Spring mix
Cooked fish & whole uncooked feeder fish	Squash
Pinkies	Pumpkin
Lean meat	Opuntia cactus pads & fruit
Silkworms	Mallow leaves & flowers
Butterworms	Hibiscus leaves & flowers
	Grape leaves & fruit

The diet needs to be varied to prevent the box turtle from ceasing to eat. They can be a bit fussy; they may eat one thing one day and go off it the next. Be sure to wash

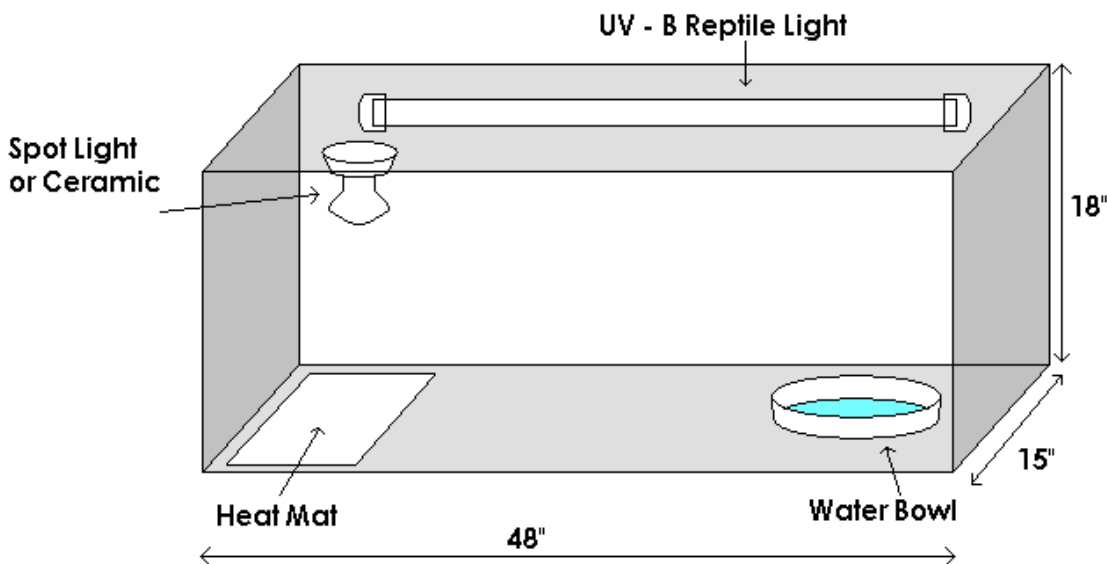
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everything purchased from a supermarket and check all insects etc. are free from pesticides, snail poison or rodent poison.

Housing: Box turtles need as much room as possible in which to roam around. Being too confined will cause your turtle to become lethargic and then may stop eating.

Hatchlings and juveniles are too small to be kept outdoors, unless a totally safe and secure enclosure can be built. On the other hand, an indoor set-up gives the owner more of an opportunity to monitor the turtle's health, also to make sure it is eating and bathing properly.

A roomy, warm (75°F, 24°C), moist terrarium can house a hatchling or juvenile. A dish of water for drinking and bathing should be provided and the water changed daily. A hide box or shelter also needs to be added. Moss and leaf litter should be used for substrate. This needs to be misted daily to keep up the humidity level. A UVB light is another necessity in an indoor set-up as a substitute for natural sunlight.



Ideally, an outdoor enclosure is best for adult box turtles. 15 feet square is adequate, even for several turtles. This area should be dug 1 foot deep. Since box turtles are good at digging, chicken wire should be laid down on the ground.

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Wooden planks should line the sides. Build up the 'walls' to 2 foot high. To create a more natural habitat, fill the area with dirt, sphagnum moss and leaf litter. A large, strong, sturdy tray filled with water for bathing and drinking need to be included. The water has to be changed often because the turtle will defecate while bathing.

A place to hide is another necessity. Large rocks purchased from garden centres or landscaping suppliers can be cemented together to form an attractive and quite natural feature. Large, rotting logs can also be used.

To keep your box turtle safe from other animals and to keep them from escaping, attach chicken wire to the top of the enclosure. This should be hinged to allow access for feeding, cleaning and regularly checking on your pet.

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Further Information and Advice: It is recommended that you read and gain as much information as possible before purchasing your tortoise. Books and reliable websites are good sources, or alternatively ask a member of staff.

Some of the best are: -

- Practical Encyclopaedia of Keeping and Breeding Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, by Andy Highfield
- The Tortoise Trust Website www.tortoisetrust.org.uk

There are also two Tortoise Clubs open to owners and enthusiasts of all tortoise species. One runs in Norfolk and one in Suffolk – please ask a member of staff for more details.

It is important that if you do have a problem with your tortoise, you consult a good, knowledgeable vet. Swallow Aquatics knows many of the practices in the surrounding area, so if you require advice, please ask a member of staff.

Phone advice is also available from Swallow Aquatics 9am-6pm, 7 days a week on 01953 718184.