

# Green Iguana Care – An Overview

## **Temperature:**

An iguana requires a temperature gradient with a cooler area in the mid 70s and a basking area that reaches the low to mid 90s. This allows them to thermoregulate properly.

## **Lighting:**

An iguana requires two types of overhead lighting. One light provides heat in the form of an overhead basking source. This light can be a simple incandescent bulb which heats the warm basking area to the mid 90s. Care should be taken that the iguana cannot come into contact with the bulb or any burning hot parts of the fixture. Start with a lower wattage bulb and test the basking area after it has time to warm-up. Check the temperatures carefully and make adjustments in the bulb wattage accordingly. A human heating pad set on the “low” setting and wrapped in a towel adds secondary warmth to the basking area. The second light needed by your iguana is a UVB fluorescent tube bulb and it is different than regular fluorescent tubes or plant lights. An iguana needs UVB lighting and without it can easily develop Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) which is a serious (life threatening) condition that can result in permanent disfigurement, paralysis and death. There are many “so-called” full-spectrum bulbs on the market, but based on testimony of hundreds of iguana keepers the two lights that are recommended are the ZooMed Iguana Light 5.0 (also called the Reptisun 5.0 - same bulb, different box) or the Durotest Vitalite. UVB bulbs should be located LESS than 18 inches above your iguana for it to benefit from the UVB producing rays. Of course, unfiltered sunlight is the best source of UVB but in Illinois it is advised that you use a UVB tube in addition to unfiltered sunlight for your green iguana as the temps aren't warm enough and the sun's rays aren't as strong enough of the year (like if this were Florida or Southern California, for example). Some iguanas become tame enough to take outside without an enclosure. When allowing an ig to bask outside, make sure the iguana is supervised at all times whether it is caged or not. Don't use chicken wire when constructing an outdoor or indoor enclosure as it can injure the feet of an iguana and rip out nails. Using a harness and leash on your iguana has the potential to cause spike damage and other injuries to the animal.

## **Humidity:**

Iguanas need humidity and moisture! Give them water (water bowl should be deep enough for the iguana to stick in its entire head). Feed them fresh food (higher moisture content). Use a humidifier and mist them with a plant mister! Soak them in a warm tub (hint: they like to poop in water and many igs only go once or twice per day - this means you can tub train them. Then all you have to do is scoop up the mess and disinfect the tub - way better than cleaning cages! You can train them to poop in a bathtub or in a kitty litter pan with water in it with a water height of about chest high to the iguana). Remember, iguanas are RAINFOREST creatures.

## **Diet:**

In the wild, iguanas are foliovores. However, our grocery stores don't carry rainforest foliage; therefore it becomes important to feed your iguana a wide variety of fresh greens and vegetables supplemented by fruit treats. An iguana needs a diet that is high in calcium but low in phosphorous. Iguana diets vary from source to source but all good diets should be vegetarian, should take calcium/phosphorous ratios into consideration, should consist of fresh foods, should provide variety and should NOT endorse the feeding of iceberg lettuce. Iceberg lettuce is iguana junk food. It fills their bellies but provides no nutrients. Unfortunately, many of them seem to have quite a taste for it (kind of like people and many foods which are not good for them). This means that even feeding a little of it might cause your iguana to become picky about eating healthy foods. Here in Illinois, the availability of greens, veggies and fruits varies from area to area as Illinois has both large cities and extremely rural areas. Quality of out of season items varies greatly from week to week. Fortunately, though, during the growing season, you can grow a garden full of iguana foods here in Illinois! In feeding an iguana here are some iguana food examples based on foods typically found in Central Illinois grocery stores.

Greens - 70 percent (should include a mixture of at least 5 greens together)

Examples: turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens, dandelion greens (and flowers too - but pick from an area that is chemical free!) endive, escarole, green onion, leeks, arugula, chard

Vegetables - 20 percent

Examples: green beans, sugar snap peas, bell pepper (all colors), butternut squash, parsnip, sweet potato

Fruit - 10 percent

Examples: blueberries, banana, mango, fig

Do not feed an iguana dog food, cat food, crickets, mealworms or ANY animal protein! Doing so can lead to kidney failure for the iguana. Also, tofu and monkey biscuits are inappropriate iguana foods. In addition to the good vegetable based protein in the green beans, parsnips and other veggies, you can purchase human grade alfalfa (just sprinkle it on top of the food - sticks very well to grated butternut squash) from health food stores as a source of vegetable protein and other important nutrients.

## **Housing:**

Iguanas grow rapidly. Many pet stores will sell 10-gallon aquariums with baby iguanas. This is too small! Buy the largest enclosure you can because your iguana will outgrow it rapidly. The MINIMUM size for a baby iguana enclosure is a 55-gallon aquarium. Iguanas like to be up high as they are tree-dwellers in their natural habitat. Therefore, they actually prefer a taller enclosure rather than a low aquarium and tend to “freak out” less when you reach in from a side door into the enclosure instead of lifting a lid off of an aquarium and reaching in from the top. Many people let their iguanas freeroam one room or an entire house in order to provide adequate space for their iguana. However, special precautions must be taken so the iguana will not become lost or injured. Remember, green iguanas can grow to be six feet long and they must be able to turn around and to stretch out safely and comfortably. Please take this size information into serious consideration if you are thinking about acquiring an iguana! Many people mistakenly believe that a green iguana will not exceed the size of its enclosure - this is a FALSE belief!

## **Important Note About Hot Rocks:**

### **DON'T USE THEM!!!**

Hot rocks can cause serious burns on iguanas. Do not use them. Use the incandescent overhead bulb and the human heating pad on low underneath as is discussed under “lighting” above. There are many pet care products on the market that are either worthless gimmicks or are potentially dangerous. They were solely created to separate you from your money. Always research pet care needs thoroughly on ANY new animal you are considering taking into your life. Furthermore, the person working at the pet store may not be an expert so don't take a salesclerk's word at face value - do the homework! In addition there are many outdated green iguana care books still on the market that contain wrong and harmful information.

This sheet is only intended as a basic overview to better green iguana care. For more detailed iguana care information please write: IL-NIAD, P.O. Box 712, Decatur, IL 62525 or visit <http://www.niad.org>