

## East Bay Vivarium

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Bearded Dragons, *Pogona vitticeps*, come from Central Australia and inhabit semi-arid woodland and savannah habitats. In captivity, bearded dragons can be expected to live 10-15 years and attain a maximum length of two feet head to tail. These omnivorous animals make excellent first-reptile pets.

### **Habitat:**

**Temperature:** Establish a range of temperature from 80°F to 100°F. One end of the cage should be cooler (80°F) and the other end hot (100°F+). It is important to offer your animal a choice of conditions.

**Water:** Mist the animal directly with a spray bottle once each day. Additionally, fresh water should be available at all times.

**Bedding:** Clean, dry fine grain sand, pine shavings or newspaper.

**Cage Decorations:** Provide your dragon with a hide box (a warm dark place for your dragon to sleep), a basking rock and branch beneath the heat source to help with digestion.

**Tank Size:** Baby dragons should be kept in a 15-20 gallon tank. Adults should be kept in tanks with at least 3 square feet of floor space.

**Special Lighting:** It is essential to provide your dragon with a UVB light source. These lights simulate natural sunlight and aid dragons metabolize key vitamins and minerals. UVB lighting is essential for preventing calcium deficiencies.

### **Feeding:**

**Feed Daily:** Offer baby dragons food twice per day. Food should include crickets, meal worms, wax worms, and vegetable plates. Vegetable plates should include leafy greens and small amounts of tropical fruits. Adult dragons can be fed an occasional baby rodent.

**Vitamins:** Lightly dust all foods with a 50/50 mixture of calcium supplements and vitamin supplements. These items are an essential part of your dragons' diet. Without them, dragons may develop vitamin and calcium deficiencies which are ultimately fatal.

## **Maintenance:**

**Shedding:** It is important that your dragon shed its skin completely, especially the skin on the fingers and toes. Incomplete sheds over a period of time can lead to the loss of digits. We recommend soaking your dragon once a week in a shallow bath of tepid water for 20 minutes, and then peel any unshed skin by hand.

**Cleaning:** Spot clean individual messes and replace with fresh substrate daily. A wide screen fish net is useful for sifting sand. Clean the entire cage bimonthly or when needed.

**Clipping:** You should clip your dragon's toe nails every few weeks. Cut just the tip off with a pair of fingernail clippers.

**Handling:** Frequent handling is the best way to allow your dragon to feel comfortable under human care. However, do not handle your animal for the first week you own it. Make sure it is eating and well adjusted to its new home.

**Problems:** The first sign of an unhealthy dragon is a lack of appetite. First check the cage temperatures and make sure that they are correct. If the environment is set-up properly and problems persist, please call the East Bay Vivarium for assistance.

**Further Reading:** De Vosjoli, *The Bearded Dragon Manual* (Herpetocultural Library)

