

BEARDED DRAGON CARE GUIDE

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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The big three of bearded dragon health: temperature, UVB lighting, and diet. Get these right and you'll have a very smug, very healthy dragon. Miss one and prepare for silent judgment.

ENCLOSURE & HOUSING

- Minimum enclosure size: **4 ft x 2 ft x 2 ft** — your dragon will not accept a studio apartment
- One dragon per enclosure. They are solitary creatures, not roommates.
- Safe substrate: **tile, shelf liner, reptile carpet, or paper towels** (under 6 months)
- Loose substrates to avoid: sand, gravel, walnut shell, wood shavings, corn cob, kitty litter — all bad choices
- Required furnishings:
 - A sturdy basking platform (throne, if you will)
 - Climbing branches or rocks rated for dragon weight
 - At least one hide for sulking and scheming

TEMPERATURE & HEATING

Zone	Temperature
Basking spot	95–110°F
Warm side	88–95°F
Cool side	75–85°F
Nighttime	Mid-70s°F

- Always verify with digital thermometers — guessing is not a care strategy
- Hot rocks are banned. They cause thermal burns. Your dragon already distrusts you; don't make it worse.

UVB LIGHTING

- Use a linear UVB bulb — ZooMed or Arcadia are 2 reliable choices
- Bulb strength: **10.0 for juveniles, 5.0 for adults**
- Run UVB **12 hours daily** — dragons are creatures of routine and will notice
- Replace the bulb **every 6 months or according to manufacturer guidelines** whether it looks fine or not — UVB output dies before the light does
- Do not place the bulb behind glass — mesh only. Glass blocks UVB. Physics is non-negotiable.

DIET — INSECTS

- Acceptable feeders: crickets, dubia roaches, black soldier fly larvae, hornworms, superworms
- Gut-load all insects 24–48 hrs before feeding — even the bugs need to eat their vegetables (see our Gut Loading handout for more details).
- Size insects to no wider than the space between your dragon's eyes. This is a real rule, not a suggestion.
- **Never** offer fireflies or wild-caught insects. They are toxic. This is not a drill.

DIET — VEGETABLES & GREENS

- Offer fresh greens daily for adults; regularly for juveniles. Yes, daily.
- Dust greens lightly with calcium before serving — every time

Approved greens (your dragon's salad bar):

Leafy Greens	More Greens	Flowers & Extras
Dandelion greens/flowers	Mustard greens	Roses
Collard greens	Turnip/radish tops	Nasturtiums
Kale	Endive	Hibiscus
Romaine lettuce	Cabbage	Carnations
Clover	Beet tops	

- Spinach? Occasionally only. It blocks calcium absorption. Treat it like a guilty pleasure.
- Fruit is off the table. High sugar, bad for teeth, your dragon's dentist agrees.

FEEDING SCHEDULE

Age	Frequency	Focus
Baby (0–3 months)	2–3 small meals/day	Mostly insects — bottomless pit mode
Juvenile (3–12 months)	Daily	Insects + salads
Adult (12+ months)	Salads daily; insects 3–4x/week	Greens take over — shift gradually

SUPPLEMENTS

- **Calcium carbonate** (no phosphorus) — dust food regularly, every feeding for babies and juveniles
- Multivitamin — **once weekly or every 1–2 weeks** for adults. Not every day. More is not better.
- Light-handed supplementation only — overdosing causes its own problems. Restraint is a virtue.



WATER & HUMIDITY

- Keep enclosure humidity between **40–60%** — desert vibes, not dust bowl
- Fresh, shallow water dish available at all times (they may never drink from it, but it's the thought that counts)
- Warm shallow soaks **1–2x weekly** if needed — great for hydration and shedding



VETERINARY CARE

- Schedule a wellness exam when you first bring your dragon home — establish a baseline before problems arise
- Fecal parasite screening — because parasites exist and would rather you not check
- Annual exams thereafter; bloodwork recommended starting around **3–4 years** of age

Call us immediately if your dragon stops eating, loses weight, seems weak, develops swelling, or starts acting dramatically unlike themselves. Don't wait to see if it resolves on its own.

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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