



AVIAN & EXOTIC ANIMAL HOSPITAL, PLLC

Bearded Dragon Feeding Information

Bearded dragons are omnivorous in the wild. Therefore, they should be offered vegetables, fruits, and insects in their diet. Fruits should be kept to a minimum, focusing primarily on vegetables and insects. The optimal diet for an adult consists of daily offerings of a greens mixture, with insects offered every other day or every third day.

Recommended Feeding Regimen

Vegetables

- Every day, offer a mix of fresh greens. These may include collard greens, kale, parsley, turnip greens, parsley, dandelion greens, plantain (don't use greens from your yard, if you've treated with chemicals), mustard greens, escarole, nasturtium, and chicory.
- Avoid using lettuce, since it is relatively low in nutrition.
- Be sure to wash any purchased greens.
- The bulk of your greens mix should be composed of the above ingredients, but also add some of the following: carrots (carrot peelings work great), yellow summer squash, butternut squash, and green beans. Beardies also adore dandelion, red clover, squash, hibiscus, and nasturtium blossoms.
- The mix can be chopped in a food processor or hand chopped and stored in the refrigerator for up to a week. The mix may also be frozen in small batches and thawed prior to feeding.
- Be aware that some beardies accustomed to fresh greens, may not readily eat pre-frozen food.
- Any food change with beardies may be a gradual process, so don't be surprised if your animal refuses to eat turnip greens, for example, if you have not previously offered those greens.
- For a hatchling, the greens should be finely chopped.
- Occasional fruit pieces; such as orange, mango, banana, or apple may be offered. These should not be available daily, perhaps once weekly.

Insects

- We do not recommend feeding crickets due to the high parasite loads they carry.
- If you do decide to feed crickets, remember the common rule of thumb for cricket sizes: the cricket body should be no longer than the distance between the bearded dragon's eyes.
- Slightly larger mealworms are fine for hatchlings.

- Mealworms that have just shed have a softer cuticle and will be better digested than the darker mealworms, especially by hatchling beardies.
- Crickets and mealworms can be obtained through the mail and at pet stores.
- Various cockroach species are being bred in captivity as feeder insects and are an excellent food source.
- Waxworms have a very high fat content and should be offered only as treats or as supplements for breeding females.
- Superworms are not recommended.
- Animals fed crickets, definitely need to be checked by a qualified veterinarian twice each year for internal parasites.
- If your animal is not being fed crickets, an annual exam with a fecal exam is still recommended.

Juveniles/Hatchlings

- Young beardies should be fed insects every day, with calcium dusting at least four times per week.
- A hatchling may eat only insects at first, but will gradually start eating greens over the course of the first two weeks.
- Offer greens to a hatchling every day, even if you do not see consumption.
- Offer insects every day to juveniles.
- If your dragon is at least two months old and eats only insects, refusing to eat any greens, don't hesitate to offer only greens for several days. Remember that their diet in the wild is primarily herbivorous—only in the captive environment do they have such ready access to so many insects.

Adults

- Offer insects every other day or every third day to adults.
- The insects should be dusted once a week with a phosphorous-free calcium dust.

A Note on Dusting

- Be cautious of vitamin dusting any reptile's diet. Over-supplementation of any vitamin can have toxic effects, and excessive vitamin D in the diet will cause fatal kidney failure.
- Over-supplementation of calcium is unlikely in animals receiving a balanced diet, and it is not possible to over-supplement vitamin D when using only UV light.

Toxic Insects

- Do not place your animal outside where s/he may have access to fire flies.
- Feeding wild-caught insects may introduce parasites.
- Toxicity of other insects is highly possible. We recommend that you do not feed wild insects.

Provide Supplemental Water

Bearded dragons receive most of their necessary water from food (provided that they are eating greens regularly).

- Not all dragons will learn to drink from bowls.

- Two water bowl alternatives: misting the animal by spraying water on the head or soaking the animal.
- If you choose to mist, you will see the dragon try to drink the water--keep misting until the animal stops drinking.
- Mist only in an environment that will rapidly dry out, in order to avoid too humid an environment.
- If you choose to soak the animal, the water should be between 80 and 85 degrees.
- Sinks and bathtubs work well. Be certain that no soap residue is present. Water temperature can drop quickly.
- Animals younger than 3-4 months should have an opportunity to drink nearly every day.
- Older animals may need to be watered only once a week, provided that they are getting moisture from greens or moistened pellets.

Heating

Reptiles require heat for efficient digestion. Incomplete digestion of food (exoskeleton visible in feces) is a sign either that the temperatures are not high enough or that the animal has a parasitic infection.

- The basking area temperature recommended is 95-100 degrees F.
- The “cool” end of the cage should be 75-80 degrees F: for good digestion (particularly for young beardies).

Artificial Diets

Several companies (Flukers, Zoo Med, Rep-Cal) make pellets for bearded dragons. These foods can supplement your animal’s diet.

- Beardies will successfully transition to eating pellets if the pellets are first softened in fruit juice (orange, mango, and apple). Subsequently, water may be used and some beardies will eventually eat the pellets dry.
- If accustomed to fresh greens the transition to pellets may take a few weeks. Mixing softened pellets with greens is suggested.
- Greens and insects should still be offered on a regular basis (not necessarily daily), when relying primarily on an artificial diet.
- Bearded dragons can benefit from exercise. Chasing insects around a cage provides a mental and physical break for your animal.

Additional Information

- "The General Care and Maintenance of Bearded Dragons", by Phillippe de Vosjoli and Robert Mailloux.
- “The Guide to “Owning a Bearded Dragon”, by David Zoffer and Tom Mazorlig.
- “The Bearded Dragon”, by S. Grenard.