



This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Further research to best develop a maintenance plan for whichever species you are caring for is essential. Because of its rapid growth and eventual size this species is NOT recommended for beginning keepers in cold winter climates.

**HOUSING AFRICAN SPURRED TORTOISES INDOORS** - The most useful form of indoor accommodation for African Spurred tortoises consists of a "turtle table". To all appearances this looks like a bookshelf unit flipped onto its back. A reasonable size for a hatchling is 2 foot by 2 foot, (60 cm by 60 cm). They will outgrow this remarkably fast, it is not unusual for an African Spurred tortoise three years old to exceed 12 inches (30 cm) in length. As the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. Into the bottom of this "turtle table" holes can be cut to allow for the sinking of food, water and eventually nesting containers flush with the surface for easier animal access. For an adult African Spurred tortoise the indoor habitat should be at least 8 foot by 8 foot, (240 cm by 240 cm) - in short - without going to great effort it is not practical to house an adult African Spurred Tortoise indoors.

The water dish in the habitat should be large enough to allow the tortoise to soak in if it wishes, it must also be shallow enough to allow easy exit to protect from drowning. For larger tortoises photographic developing trays work well for this purpose. As a substrate in the dry portion of the environment a mixture of topsoil and children's play sand or cypress bark works well, but for this and other arid loving species the substrate of choice for the author is grass hay. Grass

hay is easily maintained and provides nourishment if they nibble it. This area must be kept dry, as African Spurred tortoise cannot tolerate wet conditions. If sand is used in the substrate this area should also not have food placed directly upon it as the sand can build up in the tortoise's GI tract leading to possible impaction and even death. A completely separate sand-free area in the habitat should be utilized to feed.

In one corner of the environment a hardware store reflector clip light lamp should be positioned to provide artificial basking facilities. This should be positioned to provide a basking spot of 95 degrees F or so (35 degrees C) in that section of the habitat. The habitat should also be equipped with a full spectrum fluorescent light to provide for UVB. A UVB source is necessary for Vitamin D3 syntheses (needed in calcium metabolism). If preferred to this lighting arrangement a



Mercury vapor bulb may be used that fulfills both heat and UV requirements. There should be a hide box located in the corner away from the basking spot to allow the animal a cooler dim retreat.

**OUTDOOR HOUSING** - Predator proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option during warm weather. In particular because of their large size and grazing habits African Spurred tortoises should be kept out of doors when the climate allows if at all possible.

**DIET** - A high fiber, low protein and calcium rich diet will ensure good digestive tract function and smooth growth. *Geochelone sulcata* fed on cat or dog foods frequently die from renal failure or from impacted bladder stones of solidified urates. Avoid over reliance upon 'supermarket' greens and fruits, which typically contain inadequate fiber levels, excessive pesticide residues and are too rich in sugar and should be avoided. African Spurred tortoises are a grazing species; every effort should be made to duplicate this diet in captivity. Fruit should be offered very rarely or not at all as the Spurred Tortoise's digestive system is not equipped to handle high sugar content foods.

- Diet:
- Orchard grass or hay
- Timothy or Bermuda grass or hay
- Leafy greens (dandelions, clover, endive, grape leaves, mulberry leaves, weeds etc.)
- Cactus pads

Additional calcium supplementation is essential. Powdered calcium can be sprinkled all foods. It is suggested that one use calcium supplemented with vitamin D3 if the animal is being maintained indoors and calcium without D3 if it is outdoors. Provision of a cuttlefish bone, which can be gnawed if desired, is also recommended.

### **Medical Issues:**

While in general, individuals of this species are extremely healthy, there is a wide array of medical conditions that can arise.

First and foremost, proper husbandry is a must with the species. Moderate to severe shell pyramiding from an improper diet is seen in a large majority of juvenile *sulcata*. While it may not "feel" right to feed items such as grass hays and weeds, this is what thousands of years of evolution have designed the gastrointestinal tracts of these animals to do. A second dietary problem that is often seen is diarrhea. With bulky, high fiber, low "quality" feeds, solid GI health can be maintained and healthy, bulky stools formed. Easily digestible foods can lead to diarrhea, dehydration, weight loss, and even [intestinal prolapse](#) .

Another typical medical issue seen in this species is upper respiratory tract disease. This can be due to a wide array of pathogens including [mycoplasma](#) (will open in new window) but typically presents when the animals are kept too cold or in too damp of an environment. Solid husbandry is the best preventative medicine tool.

Gastrointestinal parasitism is another common problem in *sulcata*. While almost all of the animals in the pet market today are captive bred/captive born, parasites such as pinworms and strongyles are still often a problem.

Last but not least are aggression related injuries. This primarily occurs in subadult to adult animals and can include anything from soft tissue wounds from a sharp gular to shell lesions from continual banging against each other.

This species does not hibernate in nature. Facilities should be provided for the continued health and well being of the tortoise regardless of its size indoors if kept in cooler climates during the winter.

It should be noted that turtle and tortoise care research is ongoing. As new information becomes available we share this on the World Chelonian Trust web site at [www.chelonia.org](http://www.chelonia.org). Serious keepers find it to be a benefit to have the support of others who keep these species. Care is discussed in our free online email community, which may be joined from the web address above. Please contact us about the many benefits of becoming a member of the World Chelonian Trust.

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