

Mediterranean Spur Thigh "Greek Tortoise" - *Testudo graeca iberica** - Darrell Senneke

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Mediterranean Spur Thigh Tortoise
Greek Tortoise
Turkish Spur-thigh Tortoise



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.

This "first" pet tortoise of European children for generations evokes fond memories in the minds of many adults. While sadly most of these animals died in the care of their young charges in past times, the huge mass of knowledge that has been accumulated on their care makes them truly one of the best of the "pet" tortoises today as well. They first became known as the "Greek" tortoise because of the markings rather than the location of the wild populations, this name has stuck with them despite the fact that the ancestral stock of most of the ones in captivity had their roots in Turkey. Today this is one of the most commonly bred tortoise species, there is no reason to purchase a wild caught specimen as a minimal amount of searching should result in the location of a breeder selling ones that are captive born.

HOUSING SPUR THIGHS INDOORS - The most useful form of indoor accommodation for Mediterranean Spur Thigh 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 3 foot, (60 cm by 90 cm). As the animal grows the size of this habitat should be increased. For an adult Mediterranean Spur Thigh tortoise the indoor habitat should be at least 4 foot by 2 foot, (120 cm by 60 cm). 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.

Mediterranean Spur Thigh - *Testudo graeca iberica*



- **Location** - Eastern Europe
- **Habitat** - semi-arid scrub and Mediterranean forest
- **Size** - 20 cm (8 inches)
- **Diet** - dark leafy greens / weeds
- **Conservation Status** - CITES Appendix II
- **Threats** - habitat loss, pet trade
- **Alternate Names** - Turkish Spur Thighed Tortoise, Greek Tortoise



The water dish in the habitat should be large enough to allow the tortoise to soak in it if it wishes - it must also be shallow enough to protect from drowning. As a substrate in the dry portion of the environment a mixture of topsoil and children's play sand or cypress bark works well.

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 all requirements. There should be a hide box located in the corner away from the basking spot to allow the animal a cool 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.

DIET - A high fiber, low protein and calcium rich diet will ensure good digestive tract function and smooth growth. *Testudo graeca iberica* 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. While they need not be totally avoided, fruits should be given very sparingly to this species as the high sugar foods can cause diarrhea.

- Diet: Leafy greens (dandelions, clover, endive etc.)

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: Before purchase examine the mouth, nares (nostrils) and eyes of any wild caught tortoise. If the mouth is very pale or the tongue appears covered with a coating or plaque-like material, if there are bubbles coming from its nares or mouth, or its eyes are swollen shut do NOT purchase it. For new animals, a routine vet exam including fecals is important to ascertain the health of the tortoise. If the tortoise displays signs of illness please get it to a vet. It should be noted that dosage information available on the Internet or in hobbyist books is often dated and potentially dangerous, please leave drug advice to trained professionals.

This species hibernates in nature. After careful research of methods used to safely do this, hibernation facilities should be provided for the continued health and well being of the tortoise.

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.chelonian.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.

**Testudo graeca iberica* is also referred to as *Testudo iberica* - we have used the earlier name here but if looking for more information, both names should be used in literature searches..

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