

# Bearded Dragon Care Guide

Second Chance Reptile Rescue | [www.secondchancereptiles.com](http://www.secondchancereptiles.com)

Bearded dragons are famous for their "dog-like" personalities, but they are not "set it and forget it" pets. They require specific lighting, heat, and diet to thrive. When you adopt a rescue dragon, you are skipping the fragile baby stage and getting a companion with an established personality!



## Quick Stats

- **Lifespan:** 10–15 years (with proper care)
- **Adult Size:** 18–24 inches long
- **Personality:** Curious, Social, & Diurnal (Awake during the day)
- **Difficulty:** Moderate (Easy to handle, but setup requirements are strict)

## The Rescue "Settling In" Period (The 3-3-3 Rule)

Reptiles experience change differently than mammals. When you bring your rescue home:

- **3 Days to Decompress:** They may hide, refuse food, or "glass surf." *Do not handle them yet.* Keep the lights on a schedule and let them feel safe.
- **3 Weeks to Learn Routine:** They will start anticipating food and basking openly. You can begin brief, gentle handling inside the enclosure.
- **3 Months to Feel at Home:** Their true personality shines! They will trust you and look forward to time outside the tank.

## **Housing: Size Matters**

One of the biggest myths is that dragons stay small if kept in small cages. This is false and cruel.

Feature	Baby / Juvenile (<12 months)	Subadult / Adult (12+ months)
Minimum Enclosure	40-gallon breeder (Temporary!)	4' x 2' x 2' (120 Gallon) minimum.
Why?	Babies can get lost/stressed in giant open spaces without clutter.	Adults need room to turn around and thermoregulate.
Flooring (Substrate)	Paper towels or tile (easiest to monitor poop/health).	Slate tile, non-adhesive shelf liner, or safe bioactive mixes.

 **The "Kit" Warning:** Please avoid the "Complete Reptile Starter Kits" sold at big-box stores. The tanks are too small for adults, and the lights included are usually insufficient for a dragon's needs.

## **Lighting & Heat (Crucial!)**

Bearded dragons require the power of the sun to digest food and keep their bones strong.

- Basking Surface Temp: 100°F–105°F (Adults) | 105°F–110°F (Babies).
- Cool Side Temp: 75°F–80°F.
- UVB Light: REQUIRED. You need a tube-style UVB bulb (T5 HO 10.0 or 12%) that spans 1/2 to 2/3 of the tank.
  - Note: Coil/bulb UVB lights are insufficient for bearded dragons.

## **Humidity & Monitoring**

While dragons are desert animals, they still need their environment monitored.

- **Target: 30% – 40%** (Low humidity).
- **Why?** If humidity gets too high (>50%), dragons are prone to Upper Respiratory Infections (URIs). If it is too low, they will struggle to shed.
- **The Tool:** You need a **Digital Thermometer/Hygrometer Combo** on the cool side of the tank.
  - *Safety Note:* Avoid "stick-on" analog gauges. They are inaccurate and the adhesive is a hazard to your pet.

## **Diet: The Big Shift**

This is where most new owners go wrong. Babies need protein to grow; adults need veggies to stay lean.

### **Babies & Juveniles (The "Growers")**


- The Ratio: 80% Insects / 20% Greens.
- Frequency: Feed insects 2–3 times per day (as many as they eat in 10 mins). Offer fresh salad daily.
- Goal: rapid growth and bone development.

### **Subadults & Adults (The "Maintainers")**

- The Ratio: 20% Insects / 80% Greens.
- Frequency: Feed salad DAILY. Feed insects only 2–3 times per WEEK.
- Goal: Prevent obesity and organ stress.

### **Safe Staple Foods:**

- Insects: Dubia roaches, black soldier fly larvae (CalciWorms), crickets. (*Avoid mealworms for very small babies*).
- Greens: Collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, dandelion greens, butternut squash.
- Treats (Rarely): Hornworms, waxworms, fruit (blueberries/strawberries).

 **NEVER Feed:** Iceberg lettuce (no nutrition), spinach (blocks calcium), fireflies (toxic), or avocado.

### **Supplementation (Don't Skip This!)**

- **Calcium + D3:** Dust insects **every feeding** for babies/juveniles, and **2-3x per week** for adults.
- **Multivitamin:** Dust insects **1x per week** for all ages.

### **Hydration**

- Provide a shallow water bowl on the cool side of the tank. Change the water daily (they often poop in it!). Mist vegetables lightly for extra hydration.

 **When to Call a Vet** Reptiles hide illness well. Watch for:

- **Sunken eyes** (dehydration or weight loss).
- **Lethargy** (sleeping all day or refusing to bask).
- **Mouth rot** (cheesy substance or redness in the gums).
- **Tremors/Shaking** (signs of Metabolic Bone Disease).