



# Bearded Dragons

*Pogona vitticeps*

**BEGINNER • 16–24 IN ADULT • 10–15 YR LIFESPAN • DIURNAL • AUSTRALIA**

No lizard has a better bedside manner: bearded dragons are inquisitive, food-motivated, and genuinely tolerant of people. They're desert Australians that bask hard, eat everything, and reward good husbandry with a decade-plus of personality. The two things that decide a dragon's fate are ultraviolet light and diet. Get those right and the rest is easy.

| AT A GLANCE     |                                    |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Ambient (day)   | 80–90 °F                           |
| Basking surface | 100–110 °F                         |
| Night           | 70–75 °F                           |
| Humidity        | 30–40%                             |
| UVB             | Required: 12% T5 HO                |
| Diet            | Insects + greens & veg             |
| Feeding cadence | Adult: greens daily, insects 1–2 d |
| Adult size      | 16–24 in                           |
| Lifespan        | 10–15 years                        |



Bearded dragon. The hobby's favorite lizard personality, and its most common MBD patient.

Photo: Will Brown / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

## Temperament & Handling

Dragons habituate to people faster than almost any reptile. Hand-feeding does most of the taming for you. Support the whole body, keep sessions relaxed, and wash your hands afterward as a matter of routine (that's basic reptile hygiene, not a dragon problem). Arm-waving babies and head-bobbing males aren't tricks; it's dragon-to-dragon language, and it means house them alone.

02

## Housing by Life Stage

A 4×2×2 foot enclosure is the adult floor, and a fast-growing juvenile reaches it sooner than you think. Furnish with a raised basking perch directly under the lamps, a cool-end hide, and climbing wood; dragons use height more than their desert image suggests.

| STAGE     | MINIMUM  | PREFERRED | NOTES                                              |
|-----------|----------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Hatchling | 24×18×18 | 36×18×18  | The old 10-gallon advice is outdated. Start roomy. |
| Juvenile  | 36×18×18 | 48×24×24  | Growth is explosive; upgrade before it's cramped.  |
| Subadult  | 48×24×24 | 48×24×24  | Diet flips toward vegetables through this stage.   |
| Adult     | 48×24×24 | 72×24×24  | 4×2×2 ft is the modern minimum; 6×2×2 is better.   |

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H. Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

## Heat & UVB: the whole ballgame

Basking surface at 100–110 °F, ambient 80s, cool end near 80, night drop to the low 70s. And the non-negotiable: a **12% T5 HO UVB tube** spanning the basking zone, mounted over screen with the basking surface 10–13 inches below it, landing near UVI 3–4.5. A percentage with no distance is meaningless: the same tube reads roughly four times hotter at 6 inches. Replace it every 6–12 months even though it still glows.

04

## Humidity & Water

Dry air, 30–40%. Dragons rarely drink standing water: hydration arrives in salads, occasional lukewarm baths, and a water dish some individuals learn to use. Persistent high humidity in a dragon enclosure invites respiratory trouble, so ventilate rather than mist.

05

## Substrate & furniture

Paper towel or non-adhesive shelf liner for juveniles; slate tile, compacted arid soil, or clean bioactive mixes for adults. Skip loose sand for young dragons (sand licked up with every cricket adds up to impaction), and never use cedar, pine, gravel, or walnut shell. Stout branches and flat basking stones earn daily use.

06

## Feeding

Juveniles are insect-eating machines: crickets or dubia daily, with greens on offer from day one so the habit forms. Adults flip the ratio, salad daily (collards, mustard, squash) and insects every other day. Dust with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus, at most feedings for juveniles and one to three times weekly for adults; with working UVB the D3 version is not needed. Multivitamin weekly. No feeder wider than the gap between the dragon's eyes.

07

## Health Red Flags

A trembling, rubber-jawed or bump-limbed dragon is MBD. An emergency of lighting and calcium, not bad luck. A juvenile straining or dragging legs after big meals suggests impaction. Black-bearding all day, glass-surfing, and hiding signal stress; check temps and reflections. And know brumation: adults may sleep for weeks in winter (normal), but weight loss during it is not.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual — when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.