



Blue-Tongued Skinks

Tiliqua spp.

INTERMEDIATE · 18–24 IN ADULT · 15–20 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · AUSTRALIA & INDONESIA

Ask keepers for the most dog-like reptile and this is the usual answer: a stocky, ground-dwelling skink that learns faces, begs shamelessly, and lives 15–20 years. Northern blue-tongues, the hardy Australian line, are the standard recommendation and the basis for this sheet; Indonesian imports run more humid and more defensive. All of them are born live, not hatched.

AT A GLANCE

Ambient (day)	75–85 °F
Basking surface	90–105 °F
Night	68–75 °F
Humidity	40–80% · by subspecies
UVB	Required
Diet	Omnivore · protein + veg
Feeding cadence	Juveniles daily; adults 2–3×/wk
Adult size	18–24 in
Representative	Northern blue-tongue



Blue-tongued skink. The blue tongue is a bluff; the appetite is completely sincere.

Photo: Thomas Mesaglio / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Temperament & Handling

The blue tongue is theater. That wide-mouthed, hissing bluff almost never ends in a bite. Handled regularly, blue-tongues become genuinely relaxed companions that ride forearms and fall asleep under heat lamps. The absolute rule is one skink per enclosure: males maim each other, and even 'bonded' pairs end in expensive vet visits.

02

Housing by Life Stage

A bulldozer, not a climber: burrowing is half of what a blue-tongue does all day, so prioritize floor area and give it 4–6 inches of diggable substrate to plow through. A big hide at each end, sturdy (tip-proof) furniture, and a secure lid complete the build.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×18	36×18×18	Born fully formed and hungry; start roomy.
Juvenile	36×18×18	48×24×18	Voracious. Vary the diet heavily now.
Subadult	48×24×18	60×24×18	Near adult size by 12–18 months.
Adult	48×24×18	72×24×24	Floor space plus 4–6 in of substrate to plow through.

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

03

Heat & UVB

Basking surface in the 90s to low 100s, ambient high 70s to mid 80s, nights no lower than the high 60s. As a sun-loving diurnal lizard, a blue-tongue needs a 10–12% T5 HO UVB tube spanning the basking zone, sitting on top of the mesh 10–13 inches above the basking surface for a UVI near 3. Mesh costs a quarter to half the output; glass and most plastics block UVB completely. Skip the old-school hot rocks entirely: belly burns from unregulated contact heat are a classic skink injury.

04

Humidity & shed

Match the animal: northerns want 40–60%, Indonesian lines (Halmahera, Merauke) run 60–80%. Either way, provide a humid retreat stuffed with damp sphagnum. Skinks shed in pieces, and dry sheds stick on toes and tail tips. A heavy, low water dish doubles as a soaking tub.

05

Substrate & Hides

Deep is the keyword: a soil/cypress blend that holds a tunnel, topped with leaf litter to nose through. Avoid cedar and pine shavings; the aromatic oils are toxic. Half-log hides, cork flats and flat stones give the skink cover at both ends of the gradient.

06

Feeding

A true omnivore: juveniles eat roughly 60% animal protein (insects, lean cooked meats, snails) to 40% plants, and adults invert that ratio toward greens, squash and vegetables with fruit as garnish. High-quality wet dog food (the old standby) is an occasional extra, not a staple. Dust with plain, D3-free calcium at most feedings, and a multivitamin weekly for juveniles, twice monthly for adults. Feed adults two to three times a week and mind the waistline: blue-tongues are professional beggars.

07

Health Red Flags

Obesity is the number-one captive ailment: a skink shaped like a bratwurst with legs needs a diet, not more treats. Watch also for stuck shed constricting toes, wheezing or bubbly breath in cool damp setups, and lethargy with hidden weight loss in imports (get a fecal parasite check). A skink that stops using its back legs needs a vet immediately.

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.