



Greek Tortoises

Testudo graeca

BEGINNER · 6–10 IN ADULT · 50–100+ YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · MEDITERRANEAN & MIDDLE EAST

A tortoise that can outlive the keeper who buys it. Greek tortoises are small, hardy grazers from the scrubland and rocky coasts of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and on a day-to-day basis they are genuinely beginner-friendly: sunshine, weeds, a dry warm floor. The honest headline isn't difficulty, it's duration. Fifty to a hundred years is a normal life, so buy captive-bred and think about who inherits the animal.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner, lifelong commitment
Ambient temp	75–85 °F day, 60–68 °F night
Basking spot	90–95 °F
Humidity	40–60%
UVB	Required: T5 HO, 10–12 in
Diet	Grasses, weeds, leafy greens
Feeding	Daily fresh greens
Adult size	6–10 inches
Lifespan	50–100+ years



Captive-bred Greek tortoises show up on breeder tables at most NARBC events. Ask which subspecies you're taking home before you buy.

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01

Temperament & Handling

Greek tortoises are calm, curious and undramatic, which is exactly why people misread them. A tortoise walking toward you is looking for food, not company. Handling stresses them, so keep it to health checks, weighing and necessary moves; let children watch, not hold. House them singly. Two males will fight, a lone male harasses a female until she stops eating, and respiratory disease travels tortoise to tortoise: never mix subspecies, and quarantine any new arrival well away from yours.

02

Housing: Floor Space Over Height

Tortoises live on the floor, so ground area is the number that matters and height is nearly irrelevant. Hatchlings start at 24×18×12, juveniles move to 48×24×12, subadults to 48×24×18. An adult needs 72×36×18 indoors at minimum, and an outdoor pen is the real goal for any Mediterranean species: sunk walls, shade at midday, wire against dogs and raccoons. Glass walls read to a tortoise as open space, so it paces the perimeter for hours; solid-sided tables suit them better.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×12	36×18×12	Subspecies differ in humidity needs; ask the breeder which form you have.
Juvenile	48×24×12	48×24×18	Wild-caught imports carry heavy parasite loads. Buy captive-bred.
Subadult	48×24×18	72×36×18	Slow growers: the upgrade is years away, not months.
Adult	72×36×18	Outdoor enclosure	6–10 inches by subspecies. Outdoors beats indoors whenever weather allows.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. The minimum column is a floor, not a target; ground area matters far more than height for a tortoise.

03

Heat and UVB

Build a gradient across the floor: 75–85 °F ambient with a basking spot of 90–95 °F under an overhead lamp, never a heat rock. Nights can fall to 60–68 °F, and that dip does them good. **High-output UVB is not optional for a tortoise.** Sit a linear T5 HO tube on the mesh, 10–12 inches above the basking spot on a day-night cycle, for a UVI near 3. Glass and most plastics block UVB outright; mesh cuts it by a quarter to a half. Output fades long before the tube dies; replace it on schedule.

04

Dry Air, Full Water Dish

Keep the air at 40–60%. These are dry-country animals, and a damp, stuffy indoor setup is what kills them: wet substrate against the plastron invites shell rot, and stale air sets up respiratory infection. Ventilate well. Hatchlings do want the damp end of that range, since a shell raised bone dry pyramids. Dry air never means a dry animal, though. Offer a shallow dish the tortoise can walk into and out of by itself, change the water daily, and soak youngsters in warm shallow water regularly.

05

Substrate and Furniture

Loose sand has no place here, least of all with hatchlings and juveniles; swallowed grit compacts the gut, and calcium sand is worse. Use a topsoil-based substrate deep enough to dig in, dry at the surface, and spot-clean it every day. Then give them clutter. Flat rocks by the lamp, cork bark, a hide at the cool end, and a low slope to climb turn a plain table into terrain worth crossing. An empty floor gives a curious animal nothing to do all day.

06

Weeds, Not Salad

Feed fresh greens daily and think weeds, not salad. Dandelion, plantain, clover, sow thistle and hibiscus beat supermarket lettuce, and a planted outdoor pen lets them graze. Fruit is not on the menu for a Mediterranean tortoise; that gut runs on coarse, high-fiber forage. Dust most meals with plain calcium, no D3 or phosphorus, plus a multivitamin weekly while growing and twice monthly for adults. Keep a cuttlebone out. Skip dog food, bread and animal protein: lumpy shell, failing kidneys.

07

Health Red Flags

The one to learn is runny-nose syndrome: bubbles or discharge at the nostrils, a whistle or click when breathing, a head held out with the mouth open. Pair any of that with lethargy or refused food and you are booking a reptile vet this week, not watching it another month. Watch too for a soft or pyramiding shell, puffy closed eyes, and gritty, sandy urates that read as dehydration. Weigh monthly and write it down. Numbers notice trouble before you do.

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.