



Hermann's Tortoises

Testudo hermanni

BEGINNER · 6-8 IN ADULT · 50-75 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · HERBIVORE · SOUTHERN EUROPE

A small Mediterranean tortoise with an outsized personality. Hermann's tortoises come from the sun-dappled woodlands, heaths and meadows of Southern Europe, and they bring that climate with them: bright light, dry warmth, room to patrol. Active, personable and genuinely watchable, they're one of the best choices for a first tortoise. The honest part: this is a fifty-year commitment, likely longer. You're choosing a companion for most of your life, so buy captive-bred and buy once.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	6-8 in
Lifespan	50-75 years
Ambient temp	75-85 °F
Basking spot	90-95 °F
Night temp	60-68 °F
Humidity	40-60%
UVB	High (required)
Diet	Grasses, weeds, greens, flowers



Captive-bred Hermann's are a staple on NARBC show tables. The smart buy is a well-started juvenile from a breeder you can question.

Photo: Céline / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Temperament & Handling

Hermann's are busy little tortoises. Expect patrolling, digging, climbing over things that don't need climbing, and a brisk walk toward anyone who might be carrying food. They learn feeding routines fast, and they're one of the best tortoises to actually keep indoors. Handle sparingly all the same; to a tortoise, being carried is being picked up by a predator. Interact at their level instead: hand-feed, sit in the pen, let the animal come to you.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space is everything; height barely matters. A hatchling starts in a 24×18 footprint, but plan for the endgame now: an adult needs 72×36 indoors at minimum, and an outdoor pen (sun, weeds, real weather) is the ideal home wherever your climate allows it. Solid-sided enclosures beat glass; a tortoise that can see through a wall will spend all day trying to walk through it. And house them singly. Males especially ram and bite each other relentlessly.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×12	36×18×12	Slightly higher humidity than a Russian tortoise's setup.
Juvenile	48×24×12	48×24×18	Captive-bred availability beats Russians; insist on CB stock.
Subadult	48×24×18	72×36×18	Slow grower: expect 5-8 years to maturity.
Adult	72×36×18	Outdoor enclosure	Outdoor keeping is ideal; indoors, as apartment-feasible as a Russian.

Enclosure minimums and preferred sizes follow Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

Heat & Light

Days run 75–85 °F ambient with a 90–95 °F basking spot; nights drop to 60–68 °F. That cool-down is normal for a Mediterranean species, so don't fight it. Lighting matters as much as heat: **this species requires high UVB**. Without it a tortoise can't use the calcium it eats, and the result is metabolic bone disease (soft bone, deformed shell). Mount the UVB above the screen, not behind glass, which stops it dead. Replace bulbs on the maker's schedule; they quit long before they stop glowing.

04

Humidity & Water

Aim for 40–60% humidity. This is a Mediterranean animal, not a desert one, and Hermann's run slightly more humid than their Russian cousins. That matters most for hatchlings: babies raised bone-dry grow rough, and a humid hide plus regular warm soaks keeps young shells smooth and the animal hydrated. Keep a shallow dish the tortoise can sit in, refreshed daily; they drink and soak more than people expect. Damp in places is fine; a wet enclosure is not, and standing soggy invites shell rot.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

Recreate the meadow floor they evolved on: a deep bed of plain topsoil, or topsoil cut with coco coir, firm enough to walk on and loose enough to dig into. Skip pure sand; eaten with food, it impacts. Furnish like a landscape, not a box: flat stones to file nails, a half-log hide, clumps of edible plants, low mounds to climb. Terrain keeps a tortoise fit. Leave a cuttlebone in the pen; they self-serve calcium as needed.

06

Feeding

A strict herbivore with a deliberately boring menu: grasses, weeds, leafy greens and flowers, fresh every day. Dandelion, plantain, clover and other safe weeds beat the produce aisle; grocery greens are the backup, not the plan. Fruit is a rare treat at most, animal protein never; a Hermann's will eat it eagerly and pay for it slowly. Dust most meals with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus. Add a multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly for adults; the UVB covers the D3.

07

Health Red Flags

Learn the look of a healthy Hermann's (bright eyes, dry nose, feet that lift the shell off the ground) and treat departures as data. A runny nose or bubbling nostrils is the classic Testudo warning and a vet call. Swollen or glued-shut eyes, a soft shell on a growing animal, gaping breaths, or days of refusing food with temperatures right all mean one thing: this species hides illness until late, so book the reptile vet at the first sign, not the third.

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.