



Red-Eared Sliders

Trachemys scripta elegans

BEGINNER · 8–12 IN ADULT · 20–40 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

The turtle everyone recognizes, and the pet most often underestimated. Red-eared sliders are alert, bold, food-motivated baskers from the ponds and sloughs of the southern United States, hardy enough for a beginner, personable enough to beg at the glass. The honest headline: the animal is easy, the water is the work. A slider is a decades-long commitment to a very large, very well-filtered tank.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Beginner, big setup
Water temp	75–80 °F
Basking spot	85–90 °F
Night temp	70–75 °F
UVB	Required: 12% T5 HO at 10–13 in
Diet	Pellets, greens, fish, insects
Feeding cadence	Juv. daily, adult every other day
Adult size	8–12 in; females larger
Lifespan	20–40 years



The namesake red stripe, mid-bask. Hardy, bold and personable; you'll meet plenty of them at NARBC, usually with a pond in their future.

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01

The Turtle That Outgrows the Tank

Sliders are the extroverts of the turtle world. Active swimmers, relentless baskers, and shameless beggars that learn feeding time on day two. They're hardy, which is why they're everywhere. The defining reality is scale: a quarter-sized hatchling becomes an 8–12 inch adult, females at the top of that range, and needs housing to match. Handling is a non-event, but they're watch-and-feed animals, not hold-me pets. Wash your hands after every water contact; all turtles can carry Salmonella.

02

Housing by Life Stage

A hatchling starts comfortably in a 20-gallon-equivalent tank, and that's the last easy purchase. Growth is fast, so plan the endgame before you buy the turtle: the working rule is 10 gallons of water per inch of shell, which puts a big female at 120 gallons or more. Most keepers land at a stock tank or backyard pond, and the turtles are better for it. One rule is absolute: sliders are invasive in many regions. Never, ever release one.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×12×12	36×18×18	~20 gal equivalent; UVB from day one, platform 90–95 °F, water 75–80 °F.
Juvenile	48×18×18	60×24×24	Rapid growth; upgrade aquarium size frequently.
Subadult	72×24×24	96×24×24	Females significantly larger than males.
Adult	96×24×24	Stock tank or pond	10 gal water per inch of shell; adult females need 120+ gal. Invasive: never release.

Dimensions in inches (L×W×H) from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. For an aquatic turtle, footprint matters more than height.

03

Heat, Light & UVB

Two climates, one tank: water at 75–80 °F from a submersible heater (guarded and verified with a separate thermometer) and a dry basking platform at 85–90 °F under a lamp; hatchlings like the platform closer to 90–95 °F. Nights can drift to 70–75 °F. UVB is non-negotiable: a 12% T5 HO tube above the screen, 10–13 in over the platform, for about UVI 3. Glass blocks UVB completely and mesh costs a quarter to a half, so no lid in the path. Replace tubes on schedule; UVB dies before the light does.

04

Water Quality & Filtration

Sliders are messy eaters and heavy waste producers, and they live in what they foul. **Clean water is the whole ballgame.** Most shell and skin problems trace straight back to it. Run a canister or pond filter rated to turn the tank over two to three times per hour, and oversize it without guilt. Partial water changes on a steady schedule, a good dechlorinator, and an occasional siphon of the bottom finish the job. If the water smells, you're already behind.

05

Substrate, Dock & Enrichment

Keep the bottom simple: bare glass or river stones too large to swallow. Gravel is a gut-impaction gamble that also traps waste. The two fixtures that matter are a haul-out big enough for the whole turtle to dry off completely, and open swimming room, which is the real enrichment. Add driftwood and hardy plants if you like; expect the plants to be rearranged or eaten. Deep, warm, clean water and a good dock beat any decoration.

06

Feeding

Sliders are omnivores whose tastes flip with age: protein-hungry juveniles become plant-heavy adults. Feed a good pellet as the backbone (daily for juveniles, every other day for adults) with leafy greens and the odd fish or insect. Dust prey with plain D3-free calcium at most feedings and float a cuttlebone; the lamp makes the D3, so skip D3 powders. Multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly after. Overfeeding is the classic mistake: portion to the turtle's head and feed in the water.

07

Health Red Flags

Basking is your earliest signal: a turtle that suddenly stops, or never leaves the dock, is off. One that floats lopsided or can't submerge shows respiratory-infection signs. Puffy, swollen-shut eyes point to dirty water or too little vitamin A; soft, foul, or pitted shell is a water-quality and UVB failure. Fix the habitat the same day. A lump behind the ear is an abscess. Each earns a reptile-vet visit this week: turtles hide illness until they can't.

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.