



Redfoot Tortoises

Chelonoidis carbonarius

BEGINNER • 10–14 IN ADULT • 30–50 YR LIFESPAN • DIURNAL • SOUTH AMERICA

The redfoot is the tortoise for keepers who want personality in a manageable, decorated package: 10–16 inches of dark shell splashed with red and yellow, a curious disposition, and a 30–50 year run. It's a South American forest-edge species, which makes its care almost the mirror image of the desert tortoises. Humid where they're dry, omnivorous where they're strict vegetarians.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	78–85 °F
Basking surface	90–95 °F
Night	70–76 °F
Humidity	60–80%
UVB	Required, even for a shade-lover
Diet	Fruit + greens + some protein
Feeding cadence	Salad daily-ish; protein 1–2×/wk
Adult size	10–14 in
Lifespan	30–50 years



Redfoot tortoise: the tropical, fruit-eating, never-brumating one. Don't keep it like a Russian.

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01

Temperament & Handling

Redfoot babies are shy (wedge into the shell, wait you out), but adults raised with calm daily contact become genuinely engaged animals that stomp over for breakfast and hand-fed strawberries. Like all tortoises they'd rather not be carried; keep lifting brief, low and two-handed. Their curiosity makes them superb planted-pen animals to simply watch.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Start on a big tortoise table, end in a planted outdoor pen where climate allows, with one tropical caveat. Nights below the high 60s need a heated shelter. Redfoots are forest-edge animals: they want shade, damp corners and cover, not an open desert arena. Escape-proof and predator-proof anything outdoors.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	36×18×12	48×24×12	70–80% humidity, higher than Mediterranean species.
Juvenile	48×24×18	72×24×18	Small amounts of animal protein are correct here.
Subadult	72×36×18	96×48×18	Near adult size by five to seven years.
Adult	96×48×18	Outdoor pen 8×12 ft+	Tropical: needs warmth year-round, never brumated.

Sizes follow Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Warm-climate outdoor pens are ideal.

03

Heat & UVB

Basking spot near 90–95 °F, ambient low 80s, nights holding 70–76 °F. Warmth is year-round; this species never brumates and a cold winter shed is not an option. UVB is required even though redfoots loaf in shade. Indoors, sit a linear T5 tube on top of the screen, 14–16 in above the shell, never closer than 10 in; mesh costs a quarter to half the output and glass or plastic blocks it outright. Outdoors, open-air sun does the job for free.

04

Humidity: the smooth-shell secret

Run 60–80% humidity with a damp sphagnum zone kept wet by twice-weekly spraying. The sheet-era keepers noticed what science confirmed: consistent humidity is what grows smooth shells, and dry-raised redfoots pyramid. A shallow water pan big enough to sit in gets daily use. Damp is the goal; swampy, never.

05

Substrate & shelter

A moisture-holding base of soil and peat under cypress mulch and leaf litter, with cork slabs and plant cover at the cool end for shelter. Hatchlings especially live under cover. Keep one corner reliably damp and the enclosure drains honest: standing water breeds shell rot, but bone-dry breeds pyramiding. The middle path is the species.

06

Feeding the omnivore tortoise

Unique among common pet tortoises, redfoots eat fruit and meat on purpose. Most days, a salad of greens plus generous fruit (papaya, mango, banana, berries). Once or twice a week, a small serving of animal protein: Mazuri tortoise diet, egg, or lean meat. Dust most salads with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus; the lamp covers D3. Add a reptile multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly at adult size. Don't press a desert-tortoise hay diet on this species; it isn't built for it.

07

Health Red Flags

Pyramiding means the humidity program failed. Audit the damp zone. Soft or smelly patches on the shell are rot from standing wet; dry the enclosure floor and see a vet for anything spreading. A redfoot refusing food in a cool room isn't fasting, it's too cold to digest. And never attempt brumation: a 'hibernating' redfoot is a hypothermic one on a countdown.

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.