



A tail for defense.

Uromastyx come in all shapes and sizes. These rugged, mid-sized lizards assume a variety of patterns, colors, and personalities. But what is most distinct about their appearance is not just their dinosaur-like head but their spiky tail. When threatened, they often retreat to a rocky crevices and swing their tails at nosy predators or use them to block entrances, making it difficult for predators to extract them.

Lifespan

With proper care, the average uromastyx lifespan is 15 years.

Size

Most uromastyx species reach lengths of 10-18 inches, with the exception from the Egyptian uromastyx which reaches 30 inches in length.

Natural History

Uromastyx inhabit a range extending through North Africa, the Middle East, and south-central Asia. There exists 18 different species and many more sub species. Their natural habitat consists of hot, dry deserts, woodlands, and scrubland. These diurnal lizards are quite at home in this harsh environment and are adapted to a desert lifestyle, spending their days basking in the sun and their nights sleeping underground or under rocks.

Housing

Hatchlings can be housed in a standard 10 to 20-gallon tank but be warned, uromastyx grow fast and will quickly outgrow their enclosure. A single adult can be housed in a mid-sized enclosure, such as a 40-gallon breeder tank (36"x18"x12"), though a larger enclosure which measures a minimum of 18 inches wide is always recommended. Same sex pairs can be aggressive toward each other, so it is best that they are housed singly or in opposite sex pairs so long as they are closely monitored.

Lighting & Heating

To properly thermoregulate, reptiles must be provided with a healthy temperature gradient as is appropriate for each species. For Uromastyx, these diurnal, active lizards enjoy the intense heat of the day and the cool of the night.

Remember, they like it hot! If they could touch the sun they would. Provide your uromastyx with a basking temperature of 120F. The ambient temperature should remain in the mid-70s and can safely drop into the mid-60s at night. The use of white incandescent basking bulbs for the day are perfect for generating appropriate basking temperatures. Supplemental heat can be provided with the use of heating pads, CHEs (ceramic heat emitters), or regular white heat bulbs. Never use heat rocks as these may burn your lizard! Measure temperatures and humidity closely with digital thermometers and hygrometers at both warm and cool ends of the enclosure.

Uromastyx need ultraviolet light, necessary in the absorption and metabolism of calcium and D3. Additionally, exposure to appropriate wavelengths of UV can provide a day/night cycle for your lizard and display your pet in its best colors. Providing a high output UVB is a necessity and not just a recommendation.

Substrates & Cage Décor

For younger uromastyx, non-loose particle substrates such as paper towels, newspaper or reptile carpet liners work well to reduce impaction risks. For adults, dry, dust free substrates such as fine clay/soil/sand mixtures or reptile carpet and tile may be used.



Uromastyx are not the most active lizards in the world, but they still enjoy climbing and exploring their environment. Most importantly, they love basking and hiding. Provide your uromastyx with a large, flat rock for basking, and several other ones on both ends of the enclosure for hiding. This way your lizard does not need to choose between optimal temperatures and security. Just make sure that rocks always touch the bottom of your enclosure and are fully secure to prevent potentially fatal collapse from your lizard's digging behaviors. Cork bark flats, cork rounds, pieces of driftwood, rocks, and commercially available reptile décor work well also. Artificial plants as well as live ones may also be used to fill in the remaining space.

Although uromastyx primarily obtain water from their food, it is still imperative that you offer your uromastyx a water bowl, one that is shallow enough to allow your lizard to drink from and escape easily, but deep enough for the occasional soak.

Diet & Nutrition

Uromastyx are omnivorous when they are young but primarily herbivores as adults. This means as hatchlings they may appreciate the occasional insects while dining on a variety of greens, fruits, and vegetables, and as adults they will generate less and less interest in insects over time. Gutloaded, dusted insects such as crickets, dubia roaches, mealworms, and black soldier larvae may be offered a couple of times a week to hatchlings and juveniles and even less so to adults. Superworms, waxworms, and hornworms may be offered as a treat. Never feed pinky mice to your uromastyx.

Otherwise, salads should be offered daily, which consists of dark leafy greens such as collard, turnip, mustard, endive, escarole, kale, or dandelion greens, and vegetables, such as squash, carrots, bell peppers, papaya, and sweet potatoes, to name a few. Fruits should be avoided as they contain high levels of sugar, but can be offered as an occasional treat, along with millet seed and soaked lentils. These salads can be chopped and placed in a bowl in your lizard's enclosure.

All food should be dusted with a high quality calcium/D3 supplement at every feeding for babies and every other feeding for adults. A high quality multivitamin is also recommended – follow manufacturers directions.

Handling & Temperament

As a standard, do not handle your lizard until it has settled into its new home. This may take a week or more and the process really depends on the temperament of your individual lizard. Once your lizard has settled, preferably seen basking, eating, and hiding less, begin handling by placing fingers beneath their body and lifting and supporting the remainder of their body with your other hand. It is recommended that you start this process in the tank and then move handling to your lap or the floor as they could jump. Allow your lizard to walk hand-over-hand for 10-15 minutes per day until your lizard has grown accustomed to your touch. As a standard, captive bred animals take to handling much faster than wild caught individuals. Additionally, each species reacts differently to handling. For this reason, it's always best to do your research and always purchase captive bred individuals.