

*I*guanas are native to Mexico, Central America, islands in the Caribbean, and South America. The species most frequently maintained in captivity is the green iguana (*Iguana iguana*), which lives in warm, humid rain forests. As free-ranging adults, they are large lizards, living in trees and eating leaves and blossoms.

The pet industry is supplied mainly with young animals raised on iguana “farms” in Central America. Most, if not all, iguanas are infected with salmonella bacteria, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around pet iguanas. As soon as an iguana has been acquired, it should be taken to an exotic animal veterinarian for a general health check and a fecal exam for parasites.

Zoological Education Network provides educational materials for exotic companion animals.

Most Common Disorders of Iguanas

- Metabolic bone disease
- Renal (kidney) disease
- Bone fractures
- Internal parasites
- Egg stasis
- Male aggression
- Skin infections (bacterial/fungal/mites)
- Tail loss and trauma to toes
- Retained sheds

Green iguanas in captivity have often suffered premature death due to the family’s lack of knowledge about their proper care. Contact your veterinarian if you notice reduced growth, poor appetite, depression, dull color, swelling of the bones in the face and legs, difficulty walking, climbing or chewing food, loss of weight, regurgitation, fractures, spasms or convulsions.

Visiting your reptile veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your iguana. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting www.ARAV.org and click on “Members.”

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GREEN IGUANAS



Companion Reptile Care

S E R I E S

What to Expect from Your Iguana

Iguanas have a dragon-like appearance and fascinating demeanor, making them unique as a family pet. As youngsters, iguanas may be quiet or flighty. With gentle, regular handling, most will learn that humans aren't predators and will settle down. As iguanas approach maturity, at around 3 feet (1 m) in length, they may begin to demonstrate seasonal aggression. Both genders can become quite dangerous during this time, with biting, tail-lashing and scratching. In some males this aggression may continue throughout the year.

Is Your Iguana a Male or a Female?

In young iguanas it may be difficult to visually distinguish a male from a female; therefore, veterinarians use a technique called probing to identify an iguana's gender. In mature animals, the male normally has a taller dorsal spine, larger dewlap, larger operculum scales, bilateral hemipenal bulges at the base of the tail, and large, well-developed femoral pores.

Preventive Care

The most important factors in keeping an iguana healthy are diet, water and humidity, gradients of warm temperatures, and access to high quality ultraviolet B light.

Diet

Free-ranging green iguanas are herbivores, feeding on plants (leaves, flowers). In captivity, the following can be offered daily:

- A variety of pesticide-free, calcium-rich greens, about 60-80% of the diet and at least two items per feeding: turnip greens, collards, mustard greens, beet greens, bok choy, Swiss chard, dandelions, parsley,

romaine, escarole, cilantro.

- A fiber source, such as chopped grass, alfalfa hay or alfalfa pellets. These can be soaked prior to feeding.
- Other vegetables, about 10-20% of the diet: frozen mixed vegetables, grated carrot, squash, zucchini, sweet potato, bell pepper, broccoli, peas, beans, okra, sprouts (soy, alfalfa, mixed salad).
- Fruits, no more than 10% of the diet: banana, papaya, melon, apple, plums, strawberries, tomatoes, grapes, figs, kiwi, berries.
- Kale, spinach, tender mulberry leaves, rose petals, hibiscus flowers and leaves and dandelion blossoms are treats that may be offered occasionally.
- Sunshine Factor* may be beneficial to iguanas.

All foods should be washed, chopped into bite-sized pieces, mixed together and served at room temperature or slightly warmer. A calcium supplement, such as calcium carbonate, should be sprinkled on the salad every other day. Iguanas are naturally active in the daytime, so they should be fed in early morning. Feeding schedule:

- Hatchlings (up to 14 inches [35 cm]) — every 12 hours.
- Young iguanas (less than 2 feet [61 cm]) — daily.
- Mature iguanas (longer than 3 feet [1 m]) — every day or every other day.

Water and Humidity

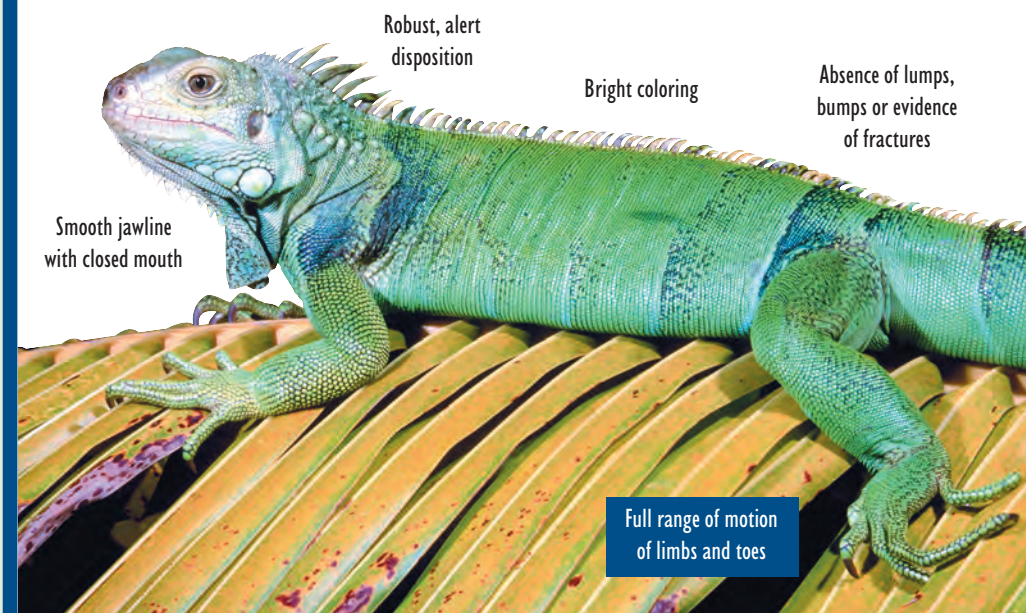
Green iguanas need an environment of high humidity to stay healthy. They should be provided with a large, shallow water bowl for drinking and swimming. Many iguanas defecate only in their water bowl so the water needs to be changed daily and after each defecation.

Light Exposure

Iguanas need exposure to ultraviolet B (UVB) light rays or a dietary source of vitamin D₃.

*www.heal-x.com

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Green Iguana



Robust, alert disposition

Bright coloring

Absence of lumps, bumps or evidence of fractures

Smooth jawline with closed mouth

Full range of motion of limbs and toes

How to Keep Your Iguana Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Feed fresh, high quality, pesticide-free greens and chopped or grated raw vegetables.
- ✓ Offer access to fresh air and sunlight, or a UVB-generating fluorescent bulb.
- ✓ Follow your veterinarian's recommendations for calcium or vitamin D₃ supplements.
- ✓ Mist iguana twice daily with a fine spray of warm water.

Always:

- ✓ wash hands after cage cleaning and handling the iguana
- ✓ keep the iguana and its bowls and cage furnishings away from the kitchen and dining areas
- ✓ disinfect sinks and tubs used to wash the iguana and its cage furnishings
- ✓ refrain from kissing the iguana

Housing for your iguana should:

- ✓ be as tall as possible, to accommodate a tree-dwelling lifestyle
- ✓ contain branches for climbing and basking
- ✓ provide temperature gradients: *daytime*: 85-90°F (29-32°C) *daytime "hot spot"*: 95-105°F (35-40°C) in one corner *nighttime*: 75-80°F (24-26°C)
- ✓ provide for 12-hour night/day cycles
- ✓ include special UVB-generating light bulbs (available from pet stores)
- ✓ be free of mirrors and other reflective surfaces
- ✓ be clean, spacious, secure, safe and easy to service
- ✓ contain easily cleaned substrate, such as newspaper, that can't be accidentally ingested

It is important to avoid:

- ✗ meat protein (including dog food, cat food, monkey biscuit)
- ✗ temperatures colder than 75°F (24°C)
- ✗ temperatures hotter than 105°F (40°C)
- ✗ "hot rocks" in the enclosure
- ✗ sunning the iguana outside in a glass enclosure (it may over-heat)
- ✗ under-cage heating pads
- ✗ free roam of the house
- ✗ gravel, grit, cat litter, sand, pebbles, artificial grass or wood chip substrate that may be swallowed
- ✗ toxic fumes from paints, building materials or household cleaners
- ✗ dogs, cats and young children