



Green Iguana Care

Cage & Habitat

A green iguana can be a great pet, but you must give him a proper home. He will need a habitat that allows him to move around, eat, sleep, bask, and explore. Giving your pet an ideal home will help him have a long, healthy, and happy life.

Cage

Since your iguana can grow to be quite large, your pet's cage will need to be big. An ideal iguana cage is often bigger than most people expect. For an adult iguana, his cage should be at least 8 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 6 feet high. Even though this is a big cage, bigger is even better, so go with the biggest cage possible.

Cages this large aren't usually commercially available and you may have to build your pet's home. A habitat can be relatively easily built with 2 x 4s, wire mesh, and plywood.

You could make all the sides of the cage from wire, or use plywood as walls for three of the sides and a wire mesh door for the front. Solid plywood walls may be better for colder climates since the walls will make it easier to maintain a proper temperature in your pet's home.

Alternatively, you could use a small room or a large closet as a cage. You would need to replace the room or closet door with a screened door and make sure there is enough ventilation.

Your iguana's cage should not be located near windows, drafts, heaters, air conditioners, or anything that can raise or lower the habitat's temperature to extreme levels. Your pet's cage should also be placed where he can watch and interact.

Iguanas love to watch and study their surroundings. Keeping your pet where he can see what's going on in the world around him will make him happy.

Decor

Your iguana will like to sit up high, so you want the decor to fulfill his needs. The cage should have various shelves or ledges at different heights for resting and basking. It should also have large sturdy branches for climbing and access to the ledges. Ramps and other ways to climb and explore can also be included.

You should also provide a place where your pet will feel safe and secure. A hide area, like a wooden box, is an easy way to give your iguana a place of security.

Light & Heat

Iguanas need UVB light for at least 12 hours per day to remain healthy. Sunlight is the best source of UVB, but that is not always available to a pet iguana. Sunlight through a window is not a source of UVB since the glass filters out the UV light.

UVB fluorescent bulbs are available and a good source of UVB. You should make sure your pet can get close enough to the UVB light to receive its full effect.

Iguanas also need heat to remain healthy. Around 85 degrees F seems to be the ideal temperature. Some heat will come from the UVB lights, but additional heat sources may be necessary. Basking bulbs and heat emitting bulbs can be used for heat. Your pet should not be able to get so close to the bulbs that he could get burned.

The cage should have warmer and cooler areas that allow your pet to regulate heat. You should also have a way to keep track of the cage temperature, like thermometers, in case you need to regulate the heat. You always want to be sure your pet's home isn't too hot or too cold.

Substrate

The bottom of the cage will need some sort of substrate, preferably something that makes cleaning up waste easy and is safe for your pet. An easy substrate or bedding can be paper towels or newspaper. You can also use reptile carpet or indoor/outdoor carpet. The carpet should be removable for cleaning.

For a more natural look, Eco-earth products are available from pet stores. The Eco-earth looks more like dirt and it is relatively easy to clean by scooping out waste.



Food & Water Bowls

Your pet will need food and water bowls. The bowls should be heavy or able to be secured to something to prevent spilling. The food bowl should be placed in a high location where an iguana will feel comfortable and safe to eat.

Having a couple water bowls is a good idea. Keep one water bowl up high near the food. Place a second water bowl in a lower location that your pet frequents often.

Humidity

Iguanas like hot and humid environments. The water bowls are a source of humidity in your pet's habitat, but may not be enough. You can add a plastic tub of water to your pet's

cage for additional humidity. You could also mist your iguana and his cage with a spray bottle filled with water.

Cleaning

Food and water bowls will need to be cleaned daily with soapy water. Any waste should also be removed daily. Substrate, branches, ledges, and other decor will need to be cleaned or replaced as needed. The smell of your pet's cage is a good indication of how thorough a cleaning is needed.

Food & Diet

Green iguanas are herbivores which means that they eat plant matter. In the wild, iguanas eat leaves, flowers, and some fruits.

Feeding your iguana a well balanced diet of greens, vegetables, fruits and some other foods will help ensure that you have a happy and healthy pet. Be sure to supply your pet with a variety of different foods. This helps make sure the diet is balanced and is a way for your pet to try different and interesting foods. Most of the foods needed are easy to get from pet stores and grocery stores.

Greens, Vegetables & Fruit

Fresh greens and vegetables should make up most of your pet's diet. The food should be chopped up to make eating it easier. Some greens you could feed your pet include collard, mustard & dandelion greens, turnip greens, kale, and romaine lettuce. Vegetables your iguana may like are shredded carrots, peas, green beans & other beans, bell peppers, and squash.



Frozen vegetables can be substituted from time to time or when you have run out of fresh food. A mixture of french-cut green beans, peas, carrots, lima beans, and corn is a good emergency food. Make sure you warm the frozen veggies to room temperature before feeding them to your iguana. Running warm water over the frozen food is a quick way to thaw it.

Fruit can be added to an iguana's diet for variety. Some fruits your pet may enjoy include strawberries, blueberries, bananas, apples, and cantaloupe. Like other foods, fruit should be chopped for easy eating.

Iguana Food

There is commercial iguana food available that can make a nice addition to your pet's diet. Iguana food is usually in pellet form and can be mixed with other foods your pet eats. Since the pellets are dry, moistening them before feeding is a way to make them healthier. Iguana food should not be the primary diet of your iguana.

Bread & Grains

Bread and grains can be occasionally added to your pet's food. Cooked pasta, cooked rice, and whole grain bread make a nice treat for your iguana. Make sure the food is chopped for easy eating.

Insects

Crickets and mealworms are often a standard part of a pet reptile's diet. This is not the case for green iguanas. They are herbivores and are not designed to eat insects.

Insects are a source of protein and adult iguanas do not need a lot of protein. What protein they need is gotten from greens and vegetables. Too much protein may actually be harmful to a pet iguana.

Water

An iguana will get a lot of his water from his food, but still needs a source water. A heavy bowl, that is difficult to spill and filled with fresh water, should always be available.

Supplements

Reptile supplements help ensure a pet iguana gets all of his necessary vitamins and minerals. A calcium & vitamin D3 supplements can be added to your pet's food a couple times per week. A reptile multivitamin can be added to your pet's food about once a week.

Supplements usually come in powder form and are easily sprinkled onto food. You only need to sprinkle a very small amount. Supplements should be added to your iguana's food in moderation. Too much supplementation can be worse than none at all.

Health & Illness

A good home and good diet go a long way to ensuring a pet iguana stays healthy. Unfortunately, no matter how well you take care of your pet, an injury or illness may occur.

Below are some of the more common illnesses that may befall a green iguana. It is always recommended that you contact a veterinarian if you think your pet has an injury or illness.

Broken Bones & Tail

Signs of a broken bone can be limping, swollen limb, or an unnatural limb position. A tail may need to have the broken portion removed to aid in healing. A broken tail can be regenerated and mostly regrown.

Broken limbs often occur when an iguana is accidentally stepped on, sat on, or crushed or smashed in doors, drawers, and cupboards. Always knowing where your iguana is at and "iguana proofing" your home are good ways to help prevent injuries. You should also never grab your iguana by the tail.

Broken Toenails

Toenails that are long can be easily broken when an iguana gets them caught and pulls

away. Clipping the toenails with nail clippers will help. Do not cut the nails too short or you may hit the blood vessels and cause bleeding.

Burns

A burn can be painful and the skin can look discolored and possibly ooze. Untreated burns can lead to infection. A minor burn can be treated with antibiotic ointment,

Burns often happen because an iguana is too close to a heat lamp, light, heating pad, or other form of heat. Iguanas often do not move away from something that is too hot. Preventing your pet from getting too close to its heat source is the best way to stop burns.

Cuts & Scrapes

Cuts and scrapes may happen from an accident or your iguana just being inquisitive and exploring. Minor injuries can be treated with a disinfectant ointment.

Dehydration

Symptoms of dehydration include weight loss, dry or wrinkled skin, sunken eyes and lethargy. Making sure your pet always has fresh water available and feeding healthy foods that supply water are easy ways to prevent dehydration.

Egg Binding

Egg binding occurs when a female iguana is unable to lay her eggs. Signs of egg binding can be lethargy, weakness, sunken eyes, and her being visibly pregnant but not nest building. It can be caused by poor nutrition, lack of a nesting area, and too many eggs. Supplying an adequate nesting area and a healthy diet with additional calcium can often help prevent egg binding.

Metabolic Bone Disease

Metabolic bone disease is caused by a lack of calcium in an iguana's diet. The disease removes calcium from a reptile's bones in order to restore blood calcium levels.

The effects of metabolic bone disease include softened bones, swollen limbs, lethargy, difficulty eating, constipation, paralysis, deformities, and even death. The easiest way to prevent this is a healthy diet, proper UVB lighting, and supplements.

Parasites

Symptoms of internal parasites may be lethargy, loss of appetite, and rapid or shallow breathing. Internal parasites, like tapeworms and roundworms, can sometimes occur when your pet already weak or ill from other problems.

Ticks and mites are the more common parasites that may cause your iguana problems. If your pet is afflicted with these parasites, they are fairly easy to treat with treatments supplied by a veterinarian.

Respiratory Infections

Signs of a possible respiratory infection are lethargy, loss of appetite, rapid or shallow breathing, and a runny nose. Respiratory infections are often caused by an iguana's home

being too cold. Maintaining a proper temperature in your pet's home is the best way to help prevent an infection.

Shedding

Shedding is normal and can happen several times per year as your iguana grows. As long as there is enough humidity, shedding should happen without problems.

Signs of shedding problems are difficulty shedding or flaky, excessive shedding. Giving your iguana a warm bath can aid in a difficult shed and may even be enjoyed by your pet.



Taming

When you first get your green iguana, he may be quite tame and friendly. He could also be unfriendly and unwilling to let you touch him. This is understandable since iguanas are wild animals and you are unknown and a possible predator. With time, patience, and persistence your wild pet can become a fun and enjoyable companion.

Adjustment

You should not immediately try to pick up, pet, or hold your new pet as soon as you get him home. Allow him a period of adjustment. Being moved to a brand new home is a traumatic event for an iguana. Give him a week or two to adjust to his new surroundings and your presence.

Calm

Try to do everything possible to keep your iguana calm while attempting to tame him. This is primarily accomplished by not doing things that could scare him. Avoid making loud noise, making sudden movements, and always trying to pick him up when you are near.

You should also remain calm and in control when around your iguana. If you are jittery, scared, or nervous, he can sense that and it could freak him out.

Hand Feeding

Hand feeding your iguana is a good way for him to get accustomed and feel safe around you. Attempt to hand feed your pet his favorite foods while he is in his cage. Even if he won't eat it, he will be slowly getting used to you being around. It may take a while to get your pet to accept food from you, or even see it eat, but it is a great way to build trust.

Handling

Every time you go into your pet's cage you should not immediately try to pick him up. Sometimes just put your hand in the cage or attempt to pet him. Always pet a reptile the same direction as his scales otherwise it may be an unpleasant experience for him and

you. Petting and hand feeding will help your iguana feel comfortable while still in the safety of his cage.

When you pick up your iguana, always gently lift and support him from under the belly. Grabbing an iguana from above can be perceived as a predatory action and scare your pet. Make sure you give him time to release his claws from wherever he is perched. You do not want an accidental injury from a claw being ripped.

Freedom

When you bring your pet out of his cage, restrict him to a small room at first. Most rooms will seem huge compared to his normal habitat. The room should also be iguana proofed so there are no places where he can get hurt or trapped. They are climbers, so be sure to check high and low for dangers.

You can start by sitting in the room and just pet or hold your iguana. He may stay or wander off to explore. If he decides to explore, just keep an eye on him. Iguanas love to check out and inspect all parts of a room.

Persistence

Try to handle your pet daily, even if it's only for a few minutes. Persistence and repetition are key in trying to tame an unruly iguana. All it takes is regular handling, hand feeding, petting, some freedom, and time. Your wild tail whipping pet can eventually be friendly and enjoy your company and attention.

Behavior

A green iguana has different ways of displaying anger, fear, agitation, happiness, and contentment. In order to better understand and care for your pet, you should know what he may be trying to tell you. Some emotions are displayed with only slight variations of movements or postures. It may take a while to learn your pet's unique actions, but it is well worth the time.

Biting

Biting is a way for your iguana to display anger, fear, or anxiety. A bite is usually not the first sign that your iguana is unhappy. Being aware of your pet's other actions to determine his mood is the best way to prevent getting bit.

Claws & Feet

An iguana uses its claws to grab and hold onto something. Getting scratched by your iguana is often just an accident from him trying to get support. Your pet may on occasion kick when it is unhappy.

Dewlap

The dewlap is the flap of skin under your iguana's chin. It is used to display various emotions as well as a way to regulate heat. Combined with other actions it can be used as a hello, establishing dominance, or as a sign of being upset.

Eyes

Eyes can display many emotions. Closed eyes can show a sign of happiness or relaxation. An iguana staring at you with dilated pupils and an evil look may be a sign of unhappiness. Dilated eyes while staring at something can also be a sign of curiosity.

Head

Head bobbing is common among iguanas and other reptiles. A slow bob may be a way of saying hello. A fast, more intense bob can be a sign that your pet could be upset or angry.

Mouth

Your iguana may display how he feels by opening his mouth. An open mouth can be a sign that he is too hot and needs to be moved to a cooler location. A slightly open mouth can be a sign of curiosity. An open mouth can also be a warning that your iguana is upset.

Skin

Your iguana's skin may change colors. Often, color changes are one of the ways your iguana regulates heat. A darker iguana may be attempting to warm himself and a lighter color can mean that he is too hot or warm enough. Light or dark color changes can also be a sign of unhappiness, anger, or fear.

Tail

Tails are used as a weapon for defense. If an iguana is scared, it can whip its tail which can be quite painful.