



**P & K Pets  
Info Sheet #16**

19 Magill Rd

Stepney

SA 5069

P: 08 8362 2375

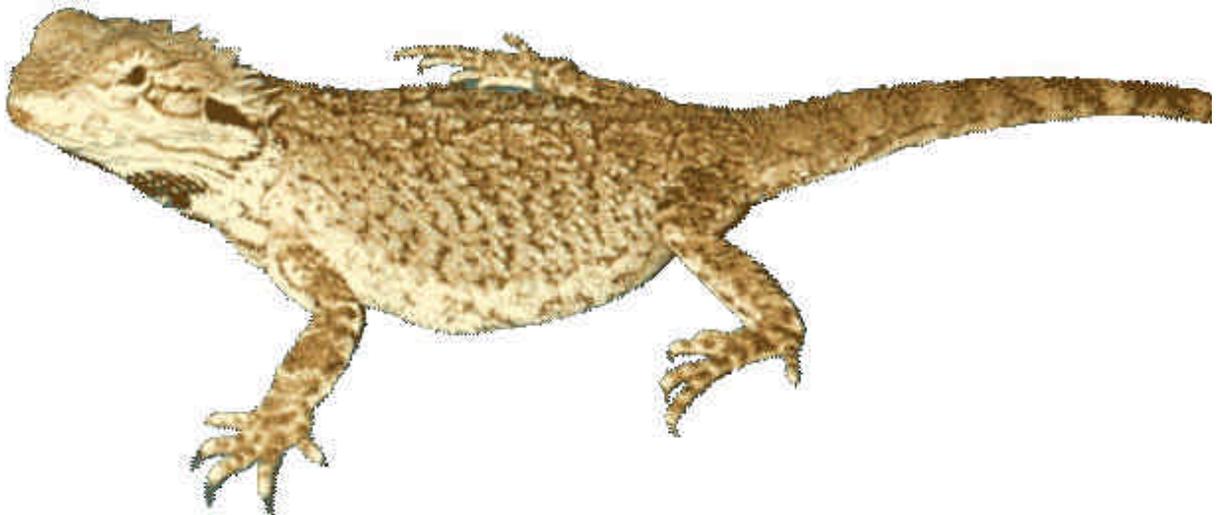
F: 08 8362 2942

[info@pkpets.com.au](mailto:info@pkpets.com.au)

[www.pkpets.com.au](http://www.pkpets.com.au)

# BEARDED DRAGONS

## CARE



INFORMATION



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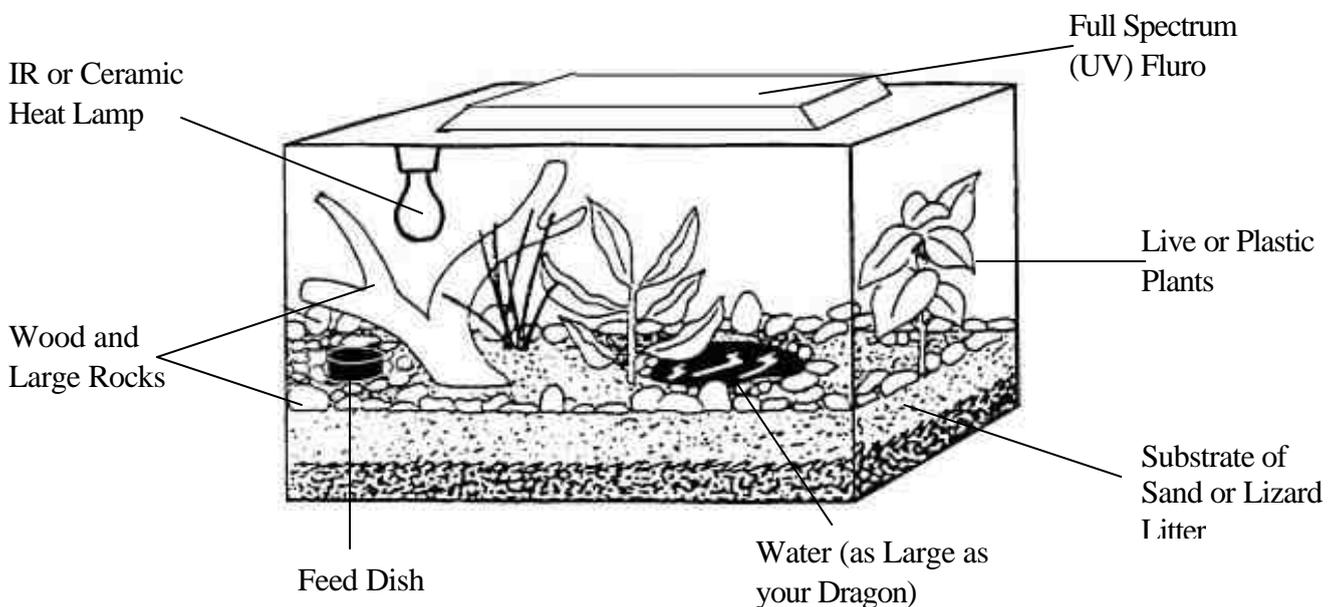
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ABN: 54 461 065 535

### INTRODUCTION

Bearded Dragons or Beardie's, although quite common throughout most of Australia, are one of our most unique and interesting animals. Their ability to display their "beard", change colour, arm wave and head-bob along with their prickly and fearsome appearance makes them fascinating to both young and old alike. The inland variety (*pogona vitticeps*) can eventually attain lengths of up to 70cm, with a body weight of over 500gm and have become the common breed for pets. The coastal variety (*pogona barbatus*) are a little smaller and not as common. Surprisingly, they are shy gentle creatures that are generally quite easy to handle in captivity. They do, however, have certain requirements that are essential to their health and well-being.

### HOUSING - (Indoor)

Some people like to keep bearded dragons inside in a vivarium (fish tank without water). This can be quite adequate for the first couple of years, but serious thought should be given to eventually relocating them into an outdoor enclosure or pit. In either case you need to make sure you have enough room for your beardie. If you plan to keep them indoors when adult, a 36" tank is a bare minimum for one beardie. A larger tank will be required for more than one dragon, and note that males will fight if they are put together. Your tank will also need heat, light, a water bowl, feeding dish and large rocks or logs to climb and bask on.





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The vivarium lid can be made from mesh or pegboard, or you can purchase pre made tank tops for the job. You will need to keep your lizard and any bugs they feed on in, while also keeping any other threat out (cats etc). The amount of mesh in the lid is important, as you will need to try and maintain 20°C to 30°C. So in winter an almost full cover may be required, while in the summer more open.

Rocks and large pieces of wood are required for sunning and climbing, bearded dragons love to climb. You should also have one rock or piece of wood that is larger than your dragon when he is stretched out. Place this item under your heat lamp to bask on. Live or plastic plants are acceptable, but if you use live plants, ensure they are not poisonous.

### **LIGHTING**

Sunlight is essential for all lizards as it contains ultra violet light, an ingredient vital for their calcium metabolism. Without it they would soon die from Rickets and other disorders. To ensure your lizard gets enough UV, you will need a fluorescent light designed for reptiles. Different brands have different ratings, but for inland dragons, an “8.0” or “Desert” tube is required, while a “5.0” or “Tropical” tube is acceptable for costal dragons. You can also locate the vivarium near a window where direct light shines in for at least some of the day. Care should be taken not to expose the entire vivarium to direct sunlight, as your bearded dragon needs a cooler place to retreat to in hot weather or when they get too warm. Some natural sun would also be highly beneficial, as it may fill any short falls your fluoro may have in the light spectrum. It’s also important to note that most UV fluorescent tubes only last for around 6 months before they need to be replaced, even if they still produce light and appear to work, they will no longer produce sufficient UV light. Your light source may be switched on for 12-14 hours a day depending on the season, or simply try to match the day/night times outside. An electronic timer is excellent for maintaining this.





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### **HEATING**

Heating is also very important for your lizard. The general tank temperature will need to be between 20°C to 30°C. However, your heat source should be placed at one end of the tank to enable your bearded dragon to regulate their own heat. At the "hot" end, basking temperatures of 34° to 41°C are appropriate for hatchlings, with adults preferring 31° to 37°C. The cool end of the enclosure should be room temperature and at night can fall as low as 16°C. With this type of set up your lizard will roam and move around more naturally. It is not recommended to use heat rocks for this reason. With a heat rock, your lizard will rarely move from the rock and be very inactive, additionally, if the rock is too hot it can burn your lizard without them knowing. Heat mats are also not very acceptable, but can be useful in raising the general temperature in the tank in colder climates. Having a temperature gauge in your tank makes monitoring easy, but is not mandatory. The heat lamp can be switched with your UV light, unless you are in a very cold environment, you will not need to run your heat lamp at night.

### **SUBSTRATE**

The floor of the vivarium may be covered with a variety of things. The material used is called the substrate. Some use washed beach pebbles, fine gravel or even newspaper. However, a very popular and practical substrate is fine sand. Sharp building sand is not desirable and beach sand is too salty. Desert sand is ideal, this is a fine reddish sand that, besides being quite cheap, looks the part and reminds one of the natural habitat of the occupants. Another popular substrate is lizard litter, made from crushed walnut shells, this product performs much like cat litter and is very easy to clean and maintain. Lizard litter is not as cheap as sand of course. Your lizard will naturally consume some of your substrate when eating and also when tasting. You may notice your bearded dragon lick the ground as they explore, they taste surfaces in the same manor a snake tastes the air. When doing this they may inadvertently swallow some of your substrate, so you need to be sure it is clean and safe. The substrate must be kept clean and free of droppings and should be changed periodically depending on vivarium size and the number of animals housed. A shallow water bowl needs to be provided that is at least as large as your dragon. This enables them to take a dip if they need to and can help with shedding. This size of water can also aid in humidity.



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### **HOUSING** - (Outside)

An outside enclosure or pit is certainly a superior way of keeping bearded dragons. Not only will they be more comfortable, but in spacious surroundings there is a better chance of breeding. An outdoor enclosure also opens up the possibility of keeping a number of other lizards. For example, large ground dwelling skinks like blue tongues, shingle backs and even tortoises will happily share such accommodation with your dragons. So, once again, it may be advisable to make your enclosure larger than is initially required.

The two most commonly used outside enclosures are the aviary type and the reptile pit. If you are modifying an existing aviary, you would first want to ascertain that it gets plenty of direct sunlight into it. You would also need to make sure that any possible mite infestation common with birds, has been eliminated. Because of the mite problem it is best to locate enclosures well away from bird aviaries and fowl runs.

As well as getting sunlight into the enclosure there is a need to provide partial shelter from the rain. This can be done by using two or three pieces of clear corrugated sheeting, obtainable from most hardware stores. Hollow logs and rock mounds may be positioned within the enclosure to provide further refuge from the wind and rain. These, along with a large tree branch will also provide good basking areas. Rocks are greatly appreciated by lizards because they remain warm long after the direct sunlight has gone.





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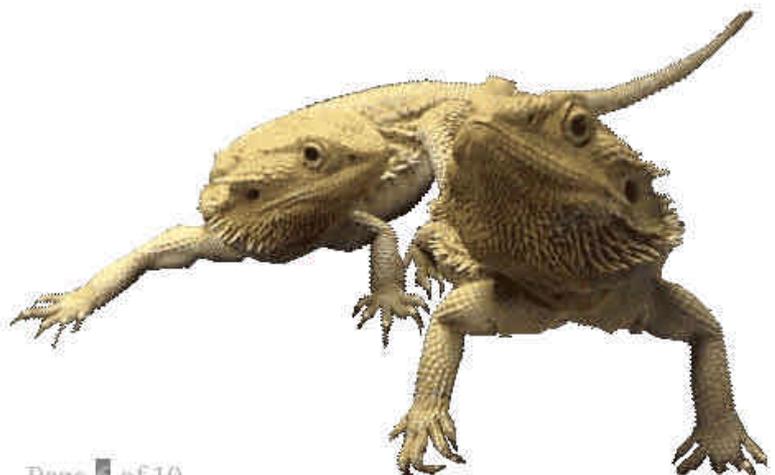
An external enclosure has a number of specific security needs. First there is the need to keep the animals in. Bearded dragons can and do dig holes from time to time. To be sure that they don't tunnel out or climb out, the use of sheet metal on the sidewalls is advised, colour bond fencing material is ideal and it should extend at least 30cm below ground level and a minimum of 90cm above. Branches should be positioned at least 1 metre from the sides so that the dragons can't jump across. Heavy duty square wire mesh can be used over the top to keep predators like large birds and cats out, and a strong lock should be used on the door to also keep out uninvited human predators. If the outside of the mesh is painted black, ones view of the occupants is less restricted.

There are a great variety of designs being used for outside enclosures ranging from quite modest structures to most elaborate affairs with plumbing and auxiliary lighting and heating. However, providing your enclosure or pit is large enough, receives adequate sunlight, has some shelter from the weather, is well drained and is secure, then the basic requirements have been met.

### **FEEDING**

While dragons are primarily insect eaters, they benefit from a varied diet including dark leafy greens, flowers, fruit and finely chopped or grated vegetables. The main diet will generally be crickets, with mealworms, wax worms and super worms as treats. Nothing larger than the distance between your lizards eyes should be used, and meal worms should only be fed as a treat in small amounts. Meal worms have a hard outer shell that cannot be digested, if too many are fed at once they can cause compaction and lead to death. If you are unsure, avoid feeding meal worms at all, and defiantly don't feed any to juvenile dragons.

Be sure your feeder insects are themselves well fed. Sub adult, to adult dragons may even appreciate an occasional pinkie mouse. Because of their rapid growth, food items can be supplemented with calcium and vitamin mixtures.





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Supplementation usually takes the form of "dusting" food items with a powder immediately prior to feeding. Calcium supplements can be added every few feedings, but vitamin supplements only need to be added once a week or less when adult. If dragons are kept on sand, food items should either be introduced in a smooth-sided bowl, deep enough to keep the food items in, but shallow enough for the dragons to climb in and out, or the dragons can be placed in a separate container (e.g. plastic box) for feeding.

A varied diet is required if their health is to be maintained and it is suggested that an effort is made to wean them onto fruit at a very early age. A finely chopped fruit salad consisting of apple, pear, banana, peach and almost any other fruit available can be provided. Fresh fruit, salad and even flowers should be available and fresh at all times. Uneaten food should be removed and replaced every couple of days. Check out the list at the end of this document.

### **HANDLING**

One of the attributes, which makes bearded dragons such an appealing pet lizard, is that with minimal training, they will sit calmly in your hand or on your shoulder. Most adults will tolerate, and even seem to enjoy being gently petted on the back or under the chin. However, juveniles are fragile and frequently skittish. Care must be taken to avoid dropping them, as they back-up while you hold them. Excessive petting may be harmful to their skin. Handling should be minimal for the first two months, with gradual increases in holding (just supporting them in your hand) for the next two months. By six months they are hardy, and by one year are mature adults.





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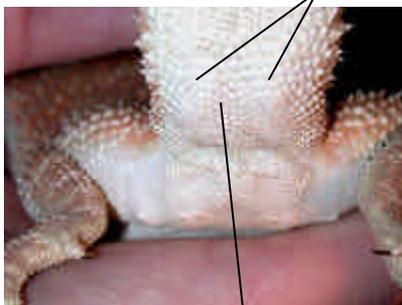
**SEXING**

For a male you should see two ridges along either side of the base of the tail, (parallel to it's length) with a valley between them. These are the hemipenal bulges. In young dragons it might help to very delicately and slightly twist the tail to one side and then the other, watching closely for those bulges. Again, be very, very gentle. Males will also have a more distinct line of femoral pores than a female. Femoral pores run in a straight line along the inside, centre of the upper thigh and basically across to the inner part of the other thigh.

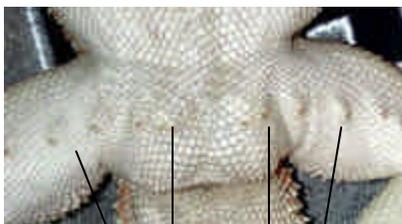
For females you will see either a bulge in the centre of the base of the tail, or sometimes no bulge at all. They will also have a row of femoral pores, but are much less obvious in females. In general, it is still quite difficult to determine the sex in juveniles, but become obvious in adult dragons.

**MALE**

Hemipenal Bulges



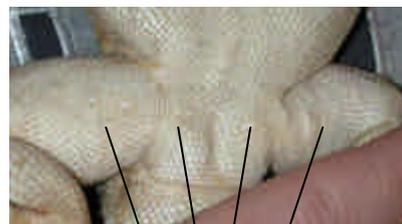
Valley



Large Femoral Pores

**FEMALE**

Centre Bulge



Femoral Pores



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### GENERAL

Bearded dragons make excellent pets. With the right set up, they are easy to maintain and look after, while fascinating to watch and interact with. Although large estimates have been made about their life span (up to 30 years), beardies in captivity have only been known to live for approximately 10 years.

### EDIBLE PLANTS

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	EDIBLE PORTION(S)
Chinese Lantern	<i>Abutilon hybridum</i>	Flowers
Dahlia		Flower Head
Dandelion	<i>Taxeracum officinale</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Day Lilies	<i>Hemerocalis sp.</i>	Flowers
Ficus	<i>Ficus benjamina</i>	Foliage
Geranium	<i>Pelargonium sp.</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Grape	-	Foliage & Fruits
Hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Blue Hibiscus	<i>Alyogyne huegelii</i>	Flowers
Mulberry	<i>Morus alba</i>	Foliage & Fruits
Nasturtium	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Pansies	<i>Viola tricolor</i>	Flowers
Peas, Green Beans	<b>NOT Sweetpea</b>	Leaves & Pods
Pothos	<i>Epipremnum Pothos aureus</i>	Foliage
Rose	<i>Rosa sp.</i>	Petals
Spider Plant	<i>Tradescantia cussonia specata</i>	Foliage
Squash/Zucchini	<i>Cucurbita sp.</i>	Flowers
Wandering Jew	<i>Zebrina sp.</i>	Foliage
Turnip	<i>Brassica campestris rapa</i>	Foliage
Mustard Greens	<i>Brassica rapa perviridis</i>	Foliage
Collards	<i>Brassica oleracea acephala</i>	Foliage
Kale	<i>Brassica napus napobrassicae</i>	Foliage
Bok Choy	<i>Brassica rapa chinensis</i>	Foliage



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COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	EDIBLE PORTION(S)
Chickory/ Endive	<i>Cichorium endiva</i> OR <i>C.intybus</i>	Foliage
Clover	<i>Dalea purpurea/ D.candida/ Trifolium pratense/ T.repens</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Beet	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	Foliage
Carrot	<i>Daucus carota sativa</i>	Foliage & Shredded Root
Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	Foliage
Parsnip	<i>Pastinaca sativa (unsure)</i>	Foliage
Ice Plant	<i>Sedum spectabile</i>	Foliage & Flowers
Melon	<i>Cucumis melo</i>	Fruit
Butternut Squash	<i>Cucurbita moschata</i>	Fruit
Raspberry	<i>Rubus odoratus R.idaeus</i>	Fruit
Watercress	<i>Nasturtium officinale</i>	Foliage

### Do NOT feed your dragon:

- Plants that have been sprayed with pesticides or herbicides
- ANY plant or bug that you cannot confirm what it is or from an unknown source
- Bugs that you cannot be sure are clean (Many bugs in a family yard may have come into contact with chemicals or surface sprays, even from two houses down!)
- Fire flies, lightning bugs, stink bugs, millipedes (Can be Fatal)

