

Mediterranean Tortoises

Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*)

Spur-Thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*)

Origins: These tortoises originate from countries all around the Mediterranean Sea – North Africa, Turkey, Greece, Spain etc. They are hibernating tortoises and often considered the 'common garden' tortoise. They inhabit dry, rocky areas and like to climb and dig.

Adult Size and Life Span: As with all tortoises, if these animals are correctly cared for, they should have a lifespan of up to 60 - 100 years. Adult males can measure an average of 16cm (6 - 7") long and females up to 20cm (8 - 9") long. Females are also much heavier than males. Juveniles are normally sold at about 10cm (4") long, ageing between 3 and 4 years old.

Diet and Feeding: Mediterranean tortoises are a vegetarian species and should be fed a strictly herbivorous, high fibre diet. Suitable foods are dandelions, plantains, clover, chickweed and sow thistles. All foodstuffs offered should be dusted with a calcium supplement such as Nutrobal, to ensure the correct levels are maintained in the diet for strong and healthy bones and shell. Calcium in the form of chalk or cuttlefish can also be offered as a more natural source. Never feed these tortoises animal protein, high carbohydrate or high sugar foods. Please read the tortoise feeding caresheet for more information. Always provide fresh, clean water in a shallow bowl. Bathing these tortoises regularly in lukewarm water will be beneficial to them.

Housing Set Up: These tortoises require a heated vivarium for overcast, cooler days and the periods before and after hibernation. It is also essential to provide an outdoor pen, with

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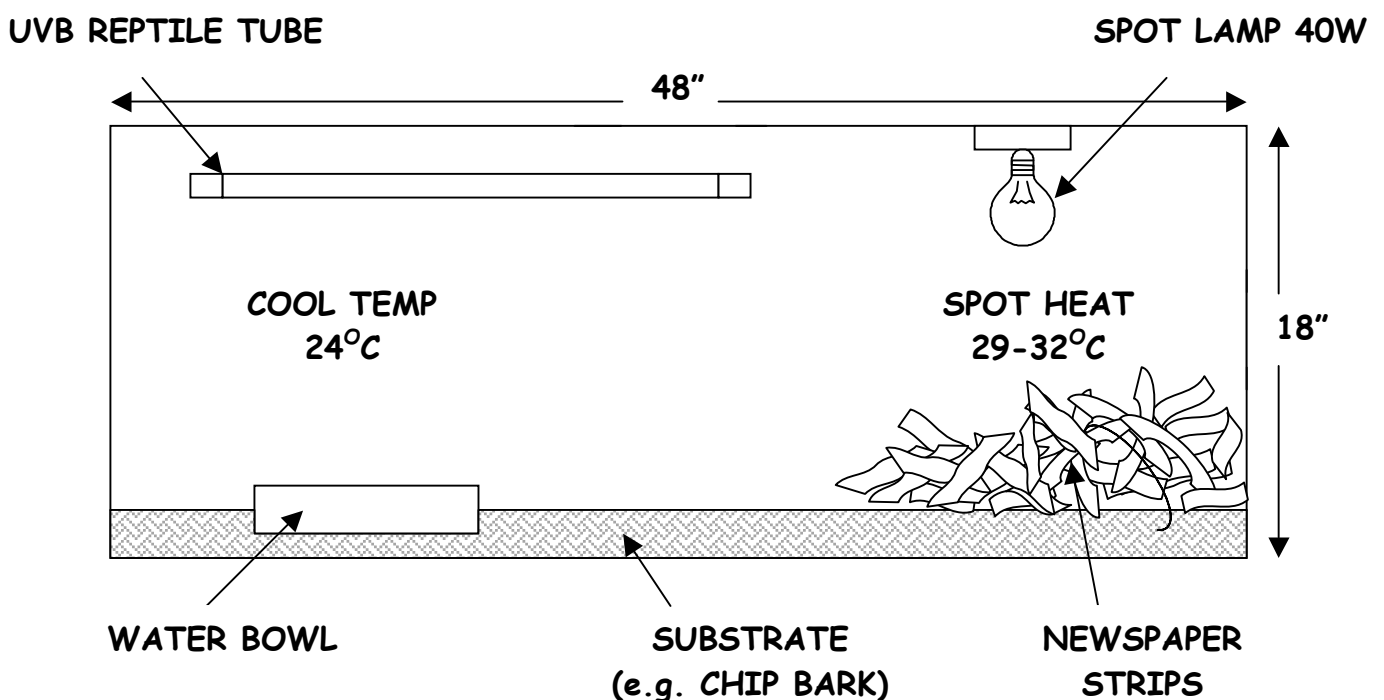
access to natural grazing. See the diagrams below for these set-ups.

Indoor Vivariums: A good size vivarium for a juvenile tortoise is a 36" x 18" x 18" or 48" x 18" x 18" as these provide a large bottom surface area. Within these set ups, there must be:-

Heating: Daytime temperatures must reach 85 - 90°F (29 - 33 °C) in the hot spots, with cool spots of 68 - 75°F (20 - 23.9°C). This is achieved via spot bulbs or infra-red ceramic bulbs at the hot-end of the vivarium. Temperatures can drop to normal room temperature at night. The water bowl must be placed in the cooler end of the vivarium.

Lighting: A UV-B bulb is essential to ensure that vitamin D₃ is correctly synthesised and the animal will maintain a strong skeleton. Use a Reptiglo 8.0 bulb, across the back of the vivarium, for 10 -12 hours per day as a simulation of natural daylength.

Substrate and Decoration: Mediterranean tortoises require a dry, sandy or loamy habitat, which can be achieved via beech chip, sand or compost. Use rocks and cork bark to create hiding areas and interest for climbing, or shredded paper can be used. The substrate should be changed and removed when dirty.

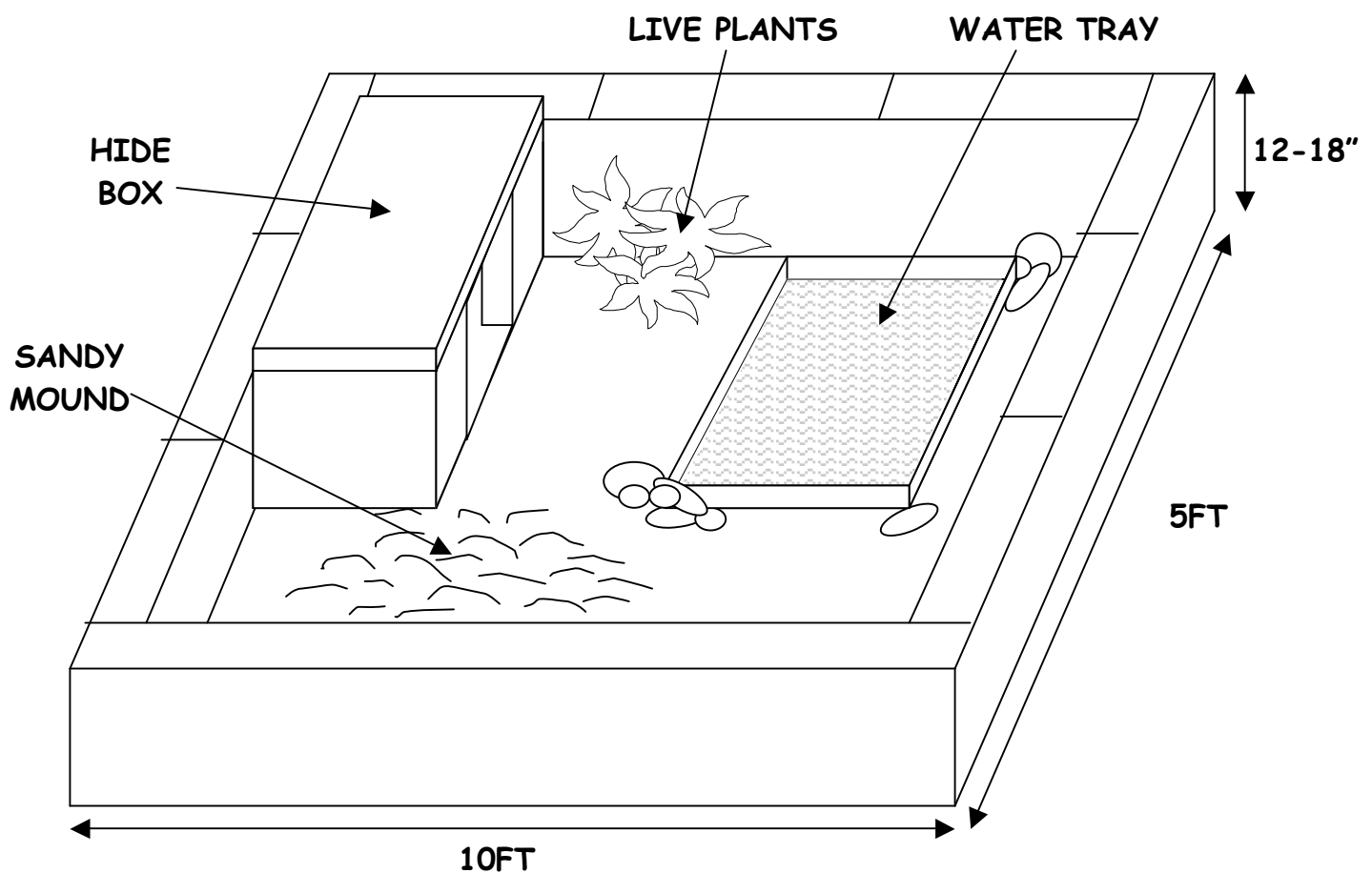


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Outdoor pen enclosure:

The outdoor pen can be constructed from a variety of materials – wood, stone or breeze blocks. The measurements given here are a rough guide, and you should give your tortoise as much room as you can possibly provide. As with the indoor vivariums a shallow water bowl/tray and hide box should be provided. The hide box will also provide a shelter for the tortoise from wind or rain.

Live plants and sand/soil mounds can also be included to create areas of interest, but care should be taken to protect the outdoor enclosure from predators such as foxes, rats and large birds. Ensure the walls of the pen are dug approximately six inches into the ground to prevent the tortoise digging its way to freedom – most tortoises are excellent climbers and diggers!



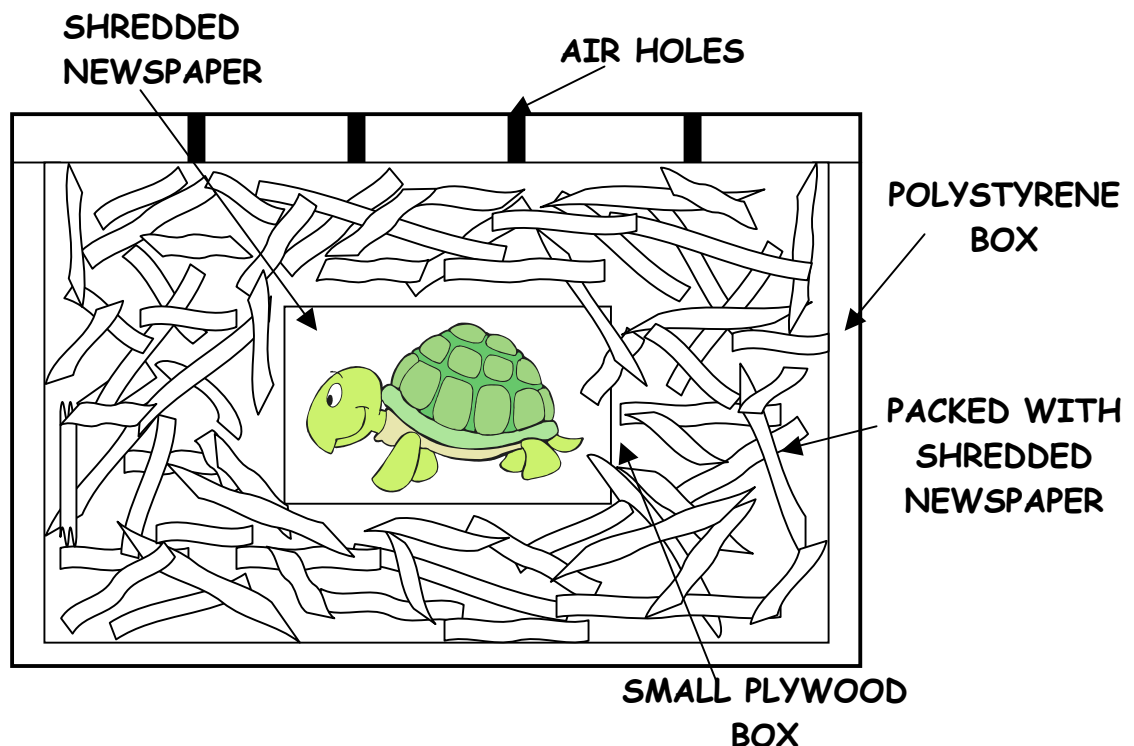
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Hibernation: – please see separate Hibernation caresheet

All Mediterranean tortoises must be hibernated in captivity, as they must hibernate themselves in the wild, so you must replicate these conditions as best as possible. It has been proved that hibernation helps to steady the growth of the tortoise, reducing lumpy shell development, and lack of hibernation can result in the tortoise losing its sense of yearly seasons, resulting in abnormal feeding patterns.

Small tortoises should be hibernated for a shorter time period than larger individuals – please ask a member of staff for the time yours will require. An adult tortoise can hibernate for up to three months. The diagram below shows one method for hibernation.

Deprive your tortoise of food for two – three weeks before you plan to hibernate it, to ensure there is no remaining food in its gut, which would ferment while it is asleep. Ensure you provide a large water bowl and give regular warm baths to help this process. When waking up the tortoise, again provide baths and access to water and the correct temperatures.



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Further Information and Advice: It is recommended that you read and gain as much information as possible before purchasing your tortoise. Books and reliable websites are good sources, or alternatively ask a member of staff.

Some of the best are: -

- Practical Encyclopaedia of Keeping and Breeding Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, by Andy Highfield
- The Tortoise Trust Website www.tortoisetrust.org.uk

There are also two Tortoise Clubs open to owners and enthusiasts of all tortoise species. One runs in Norfolk and one in Suffolk – please ask a member of staff for more details.

It is important that if you do have a problem with your tortoise, you consult a good, knowledgeable vet. Swallow Aquatics knows many of the practices in the surrounding area, so if you require advice, please ask a member of staff.

Phone advice is also available from Swallow Aquatics 9am-6pm, 7 days a week on 01953 718184.