

Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society
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Common Name: Greek Tortoise, Spur-Thigh Tortoise

Scientific Name: *Testudo graeca*

Native to: Southern Spain, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe and Middle East

Size: Adult carapace size is 6 – 7 inches. Hatchlings average 1½ – 2 inches.

Life span: Estimated to be over 50 years with proper care

General appearance: The coloration of this tortoise is highly variable and can range from olive with dark spots in the middle of each scute on the carapace to a “golden” form which is almost entirely yellow in appearance.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: The best enclosure for tortoises is an open “turtle table” of approximately 4 feet long by 2 feet wide by 1 to 2 feet deep for an adult Greek Tortoise though the bigger the better. Often preformed plastic garden ponds can be easily converted for this task. Aquariums are not recommended for tortoises as they do not allow proper air circulation. Very large screen enclosures such as a “Reptarium” may also be adequate.

Temperature: A temperature gradient of 75° – 85° F should be provided with a basking area of 95° F. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop to 75° F

Heat/Light: Temperatures can be maintained by using incandescent basking bulbs, infrared heat bulbs or ceramic emitters. As with most species of tortoises UVA and UVB light sources need to be provided. This can be achieved with specialized fluorescent bulbs. Many have had great success with newer mercury vapor bulbs which provide both heat and UVA and UVB light in one bulb that fits into a standard incandescent fixture.

Substrate: A variety of substrates can be used. A sandy soil mix of 50% topsoil and 50% Caribbean play sand is often used with great success. Aspen shavings, milled coconut fiber and even compressed recycled paper (e.g. Carefresh) can also be used.

Environment: This is a terrestrial species which prefers a dry climate. A suitable place to hide should also be provided. Such hiding places can be constructed from rocks or plastic containers. Commercially manufactured caves can also be used.

Diet: The Greek tortoise is strictly herbivorous. They require a high fiber, low protein and calcium rich diet. Dark leafy greens such as kale, dandelion, mustard, collard and turnip greens should be fed regularly. Natural grasses and hays can also be provided. High protein foods such as commercially prepared dog and cat food and beans should be avoided at all costs since this will eventually cause renal failure due to the excessive protein. Fruits can be given sparingly since too many fruits will result in diarrhea and other health issues. If calcium supplementation is required try to use pure calcium carbonate. Fresh water should be offered at all times in a shallow dish.

Maintenance: The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily. A thorough cleaning should be performed on a regular basis. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before replacing the substrate and placing the tortoise back in the enclosure. It is always recommended to wash your hands thoroughly after handling the tortoise or cleaning the cage and cage accessories.

Other references or recommended reading:

Highfield, A.C. “Basic Care of Mediterranean Tortoises.” Retrieved November 2008
<http://www.tortoisetrust.org/articles/Basicmedcare.htm>

Graham, Mark. “Greek/Spur Thigh Tortoise.” 28 February 2000. Retrieved November 2008
<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/cheloniuk/care.htm>

Senneke, Darrell. “Golden Greek Tortoise.” World Chelonian Trust. Retrieved November 2008
<http://www.chelonia.org/Articles/tiberagoldengreekcare.htm>

This document is for guidance only and should not be used as the sole source of information. New information is being developed daily. It is recommend that a concerted effort be made to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the animals of interest