

Hermann's tortoise

Testudo hermanni

 Tortue d'Hermann  Griechische Landschildkröte

NAC+Vet



REGULATIONS

CITES Appendix II

Proof of origin required; CITES permits for import/export. OPAn: outdoor enclosure/UVB, hibernation; microchip recommended depending on size/age; keep records. Release prohibited.



LIFESPAN

70-100 years



ADULT WEIGHT

0.5-3.5 kg



ADULT SIZE

7-28 cm



LIFESTYLE

Mediterranean arid habitats, diurnal, terrestrial



BODY TEMPERATURE

Ectothermic / poikilothermic



SEXUAL MATURITY

8-10 years



INCUBATION

70-90 days



LITTER / CLUTCH SIZE

1-5 eggs



Habitat & environment

Type — Natural outdoor enclosure all warm season (mid-April to mid-October depending on climate). Terrarium only for juveniles, convalescence or pre-/post-hibernation. South-facing, sheltered from prevailing wind.

Substrate — Outdoors: garden soil/sparse turf + slate stones for basking; small leaf litter patches for digging in. Indoors: kitchen paper, newspaper or Sandmat Exoterra®. Avoid sand, fine soil and ingestible shavings (intestinal impaction).

Exercise — Large outdoor grazing area for browsing, scratching, sun-basking and hiding. Tortoises naturally roam several tens of metres per day.

Equipment

- Sturdy fence (concrete, treated wood or stone), ≥ 30 cm high, buried 20-30 cm against escape and digging predators
- Rounded corners (tortoises climb in corners)
- Covered shelter (wooden hutch, cold frame) for rain/cold
- Sunny basking zone with slate slabs/stones
- Shaded areas under shrubs (thermal refuge)
- Shallow, wide water dish (5-8 cm), rough rim for exit
- Edible plantings: dandelion, clover, sow thistle, plantain, daisy, hibiscus, mallow
- Cuttlebone free-choice
- Nesting box (moist sand/soil, half-sun) for females from 7-8 years
- Anti-corvid netting for juveniles (crows/magpies)

To avoid

- Fine sand / loose soil indoors (intestinal impaction)
- Hot rocks or floor heat plates (plastron burns)
- Unprotected UV lamps (burn risk, too close)
- Glass between tortoise and UV (UVB does not pass through glass)

- Resinous wood shavings (pine, cedar) in large amounts
- Enclosure without permanent shade (heat stroke)
- Deep water dish (>10 cm without ramp; drowning risk)

Technical parameters

 Hot spot	30–35 °C Basking spot under the lamp; temperature measured at the basking surface.
 Cool spot	18–25 °C Cool and night zone; tolerates down to 15 °C at night outside hibernation.
 Humidity	50–70 % Moderate; higher (60–70 %) in juveniles to prevent shell pyramiding.

Lighting

 **Photoperiod** — 10–12 h/day during activity; gradually shortened pre-hibernation (8 → 6 h over 2–3 weeks). Outdoors the natural photoperiod is sufficient.

 **UVB need** — Vital indoors (without UVB no vitamin D3 synthesis or calcium absorption); natural outdoors (>20 °C, sunny)

 **Lamp type** — Metal-halide lamps with external ballast (UVB + heat combined) or T5 HO 12 % tube with separate heat spot

 **Recommended brands** — X-Reptile · Reptile Expert · Solar Raptor · Arcadia

 **Replacement** — Yearly (metal-halide) — standard UV tubes every 6 months (UVB depletes before visible light)

 **Basking** — South-facing slate slab (outdoors) or metal-halide lamp at 30–40 cm distance (indoors). Reach 30–35 °C at the shell surface.

 **UVB** does not pass through glass or plexiglass. Place the lamp inside the terrarium, under a protective grille.

 Metal halide lamps are the gold standard for UV: powerful UVB spectrum, far stronger than fluorescent tubes or compact bulbs, optimising vitamin D synthesis and calcium absorption. They lower the risk of metabolic bone disease; intense visible light and even heat drive activity.

Environmental hazards & toxins

Plants  Lily ·  Oleander ·  Yew ·  Lily of the valley ·  Foxglove ·  Rhododendron / azalea ·  Kalanchoe ·  Lantana ·  Rhubarb leaves ·  Cherry laurel & Prunus species ·  Datura & deadly nightshade ·  Hemlock ·  Hydrangea ·  Red maple (wilted leaves)

Chemicals  Slug bait (metaldehyde) ·  Herbicides & chemical fertilisers ·  Household insecticides ·  Rodenticides ·  Salt & salty water

Behaviour

Ectothermic, poikilothermic reptile. Solitary in the wild; in captivity tolerates conspecifics in a large enclosure. Main behaviour: sun-basking thermoregulation, browsing and walking, hiding during midday heat, foraging substrate for water and tender plants.

 **Social life** — Solitary leaning; a male/female pair exposes the female to constant harassment (exhaustion, shell wounds). Prefer 1 male / 2–3 females or female-only groups. Separate males (territorial fights). Never cohabit with other tortoise species (infection risk).

 **Activity cycle** — Diurnal. Peak activity mid-morning (basking) then grazing; midday siesta in shade; second peak in the afternoon. At night, retreat to shelter or shallow burrowing.

 **Sleep & rest** — No prolonged uninterrupted sleep in active season; retreats to shelter at night. The "deep rest" is hibernation (October–March), distinct from daily sleep.

Foraging

Enrichment

- Grazing area planted with edible varieties to forage
- Leaf-litter / straw piles to bury in
- Stumps and stones to climb (safely)
- Weekly lukewarm bath (28–30 °C)
- Scattered food distribution to encourage walking

Foraging — Techniques

- Plant dandelion, clover, plantain and hibiscus in the enclosure (spontaneous grazing)

Natural grazing behaviour: the tortoise walks, browses, scratches the ground and explores. Food scattered in the planted enclosure is the ideal enrichment — far more relevant than a heap in a dish. Promotes physical activity, sun exposure and digestive health.

 **Time in the wild** — Several hours per day grazing and exploring (in active season)

- Scatter harvested greens in several spots rather than in a pile
- Hide favourite fruit under flat stones
- Vary weekly: shift the distribution zones
- Lukewarm bath + drinking: the animal also seeks its water

Nutrition

Strict herbivore: 90 % varied fibrous greens (wild herbs, flowers, leaves), max. 10 % fruit. Favour foods with a high Ca/P ratio (≥ 2). Natural grazing in a planted enclosure is the ideal base. No animal protein.

Daily base · 90 %

-  **Dandelion** Ca/P 5.2 Vit A
Entier (feuilles + fleurs); Ca/P ~5,2; vit. A++
-  **Houseleek** Ca/P 3
Joubarbe; Ca/P ~21 (excellent)
-  **Clover** Ca/P 5
Trèfle; Ca/P ~6,6
-  **Alfalfa** Ca/P 5.5
Luzerne; Ca/P ~6,1 — à modérer (protéines)
-  **Plantain** Ca/P 3
Ca/P ~3,4
-  **Common Sowthistle** Ca/P 3
Laiteron; Ca/P ~3
-  **Nipplewort** Ca/P 3
Lampasane

-  **Daisy** Ca/P 2
Pâquerette
-  **Watercress** Ca/P 3.5 Vit A
Très riche en vitamine A
-  **Turnip Greens** Ca/P 4.5 Vit A
Fanes de navet; Ca/P ~4,5
-  **Swiss Chard** Ca/P 2.5 Vit A
Bette poirée; à varier (oxalates)
-  **Kale** Ca/P 2.4 Vit A
Chou vert; Ca/P ~2,4 + vit. A
-  **Bok Choy** Ca/P 3.5
Chou chinois; Ca/P ~3,5
-  **Arugula** Ca/P 4 Vit A
Roquette; Ca/P ~4,6

-  **Endive** Ca/P 1.8 Vit A
Riche en vit. A
-  **Escarole** Ca/P 2.3 Vit A
-  **Curly Endive** Ca/P 2.5 Vit A
Frisée; bonne fibre
-  **Romaine Lettuce** Ca/P 2 Vit A
Ca/P ~2; riche en vit. A
-  **Lamb's Lettuce** Ca/P 2.5 Vit A
Mâche; bonne source vit. A
-  **Parsley** Ca/P 3.3
Petit complément (modéré, oxalates)

+ 12 more ideas at nacvet.ch

Vegetables & greens

Supplemental plants and leaves to vary the grazing base. Lightly chop for juveniles or poor chewers.

-  **Bell Pepper** Ca/P 0.6
Petit complément, peu sucré
-  **Zucchini** Ca/P 0.7
Hydratant; à modérer (Ca/P faible)
-  **Green Bean** Ca/P 0.9
Modéré
-  **Rutabaga** Ca/P 3.2
Feuilles; Ca/P ~3,2

Pellets & supplements

Recommended brands : Mazuri Tortoise LS · Pre-Alpin Testudo · ZooMed Natural Grassland Tortoise

Tortoise herbivore pellets as occasional supplement, always rehydrated (prevents water deficit and improves chewing). Not as the staple.

-  **Pellet**
Réhydraté 5–10 min avant distribution

Treats (occasional) · 10 %

Fruit and sweeter plants in very small amounts (max 10 % of the diet). Favour vitamin-A-rich sources.

-  **Apricot** Ca/P 0.8 Vit A
Riche en vit. A
-  **Prickly Pear** Ca/P 2.3
Figue de barbarie; excellent Ca/P
-  **Guava** Ca/P 1.1
Source vit. C
-  **Melon** Ca/P 0.6 Vit A
Riche en vit. A
-  **Fig** Ca/P 2.1
Fraîche; Ca/P ~2,1
-  **Kiwi** Ca/P 0.6
Très occasionnel
-  **Papaya** Ca/P 0.8
Riche en vit. A; effet légèrement laxatif
-  **Dried Fig** Ca/P 1.8
Figue sèche; Ca/P ~1,8
-  **Blackberry** Ca/P 0.9
Mûre de culture
-  **Mango** Ca/P 0.5
Riche en vit. A
-  **Orange** Ca/P 1.8
Épluchée; modéré
-  **Kumquat** Ca/P 0.9
Petit, occasionnel
-  **Watermelon** Ca/P 0.6
Hydratant
-  **Mandarin / Clementine** Ca/P 1.2
Clémentine; modéré
-  **Roselle** Ca/P 1.2
Fleur d'hibiscus; appréciée

Hydration

Fresh water permanently in a wide, shallow dish, changed once daily. Lukewarm baths (28–30 °C, 15–20 min) weekly in active season, daily pre-/post-hibernation. Tortoises drink mostly while bathing and from juicy plants.

Vitamin A

Essential for mucous membranes, skin, shedding and vision. Deficiency: puffy eyes, dysecdysis, respiratory/eye infections, poor shell quality. Covered by rich greens: dandelion (≈ 397,000 IU/kg DM), watercress (≈ 422,000), romaine (≈ 274,000), spinach (≈ 301,000), endive, turnip greens, kale, mango, papaya, apricot, melon.

FREQUENCY

- Daily in active season (April to October), portion eaten within 15–20 min
- 1–2 fasting days/week tolerated in adults (prevents obesity and pyramiding)
- Gradual fasting from September before hibernation
- Calcium and cuttlebone permanently free-choice
- Fresh water permanently available

CALCIUM/PHOSPHORUS RATIO (CA/P)

Key indicator of a food's mineral balance, especially in reptiles: a calcium-favoured ratio supports bone and shell strength. Targets: ≥ 2 = balanced · 1–2 = in moderation · < 1 = avoid (encourages metabolic bone disease). For insects, a calcium powder at feeding time offsets an unfavourable ratio.

TO AVOID

Toxic, severely unbalanced foods (poor Ca/P, sugar/starch-rich) or unsuitable for the strict herbivore. Animal protein is forbidden (causes gout, MBD, liver damage).



Avocado

Persine — cardiotoxique



Rhubarb

Acide oxalique



Eggplant

Solanine



Daffodil

Toxique



Azalea

Grayanotoxines



Tulip

Tuliposides



Firefly

Mortel



Mushroom

Ca/P 0,06



Corn

Ca/P 0,1; amidon trop élevé



Brussels Sprouts

Ca/P 0,2; goitre



Banana

Trop sucré; Ca/P 0,3



Tomato

Acidité + Ca/P 0,4



Lettuce

Iceberg/ronde : trop d'eau, peu nutritive



Peach

Trop sucré; Ca/P 0,4



Apple

Trop sucré; Ca/P 0,5



Cucumber

Concombre : trop d'eau, Ca/P 0,5



Cauliflower

Goitre



Carrot

Trop sucré; Ca/P 0,6



Grape

Trop sucré



Strawberry

Trop sucré



Raspberry

À limiter



Chicken

Pas de protéine animale



Fatty meat

Pas de protéine animale



Dairy product

Inadapté



Bread

Inadapté



Pasta

Inadapté



Health & prevention



Preventive medicine

Annual clinical exam (shell, nostrils, eyes, oral cavity, plastron, body condition), monthly weighing (trend curve), yearly faecal exam before hibernation, microchip from ~10 cm shell length, quarantine ≥ 3 months for any new specimen (Mycoplasma agassizii and herpesvirus screening in at-risk animals). Annual UVB lamp replacement indoors.



Vaccination

No routine vaccinations in Hermann's tortoise.



Surgery & neutering

Common procedures: ovariectomy for dystocia (egg retention), shell wound care (fractures, predator injuries), cloacal/penile prolapse correction, abscess removal (notably aural



WARNING SIGNS

- Soft or deformed shell (MBD)
- Poor shedding, dry/cracked skin
- Nasal or eye discharge, open-mouth breathing (RNS)
- Apathy, feeding refusal > 5–7 days in active season
- Weight loss > 10 % (especially post-hibernation)
- Distended abdomen, penguin-gait in females (dystocia)
- Plastron with yellow/brown stains (fungus, ulcer)
- Blood in urine or stools
- Tortoise not recovering from hibernation (post-lethargic state)

abscesses), bladder stone removal (urates), shell repair with epoxy resin.



Common conditions

Metabolic bone disease (MBD)

SYMPTOMS Soft/deformed shell (pyramiding), soft beak, slow growth, spontaneous fractures, limb weakness

CAUSE Calcium and/or UVB deficiency, excess fruit, unbalanced Ca/P, inadequate humidity in juveniles

PREVENTION UVB 10–12 % replaced yearly, free-choice calcium, high-Ca/P greens, age-appropriate humidity

Runny nose syndrome (RNS, *Mycoplasma agassizii* / herpesvirus)

SYMPTOMS Serous then mucopurulent nasal discharge, wheezing, appetite loss, conjunctivitis, possible mortality with herpesvirus

CAUSE Bacteria (*Mycoplasma agassizii*, *Pasteurella*) or viruses (chelonid herpesvirus) — often introduced by new specimens without quarantine

PREVENTION Quarantine ≥ 3 months for any new arrival, no mixing of tortoise species, *Mycoplasma*/herpes PCR screening if suspected

Dystocia / egg retention

SYMPTOMS Anorexic female, > 1 week digging activity without laying, distended abdomen, penguin-gait

CAUSE No suitable nesting site, hypocalcaemia, oversized eggs, dehydration, stress

PREVENTION Nesting box with moist sand/soil accessible all season, adequate calcium, hydration, yearly female check-up

Shell ulcers / mycosis (shell ulcerative disease)

SYMPTOMS White/yellow/brown spots on plastron or carapace, progressive erosion, oozing, foul smell

CAUSE Substrate too damp or soiled, untreated wounds, parasitism (flies/maggots)

PREVENTION Dry, clean substrate, regular cleaning, weekly shell check, antifungal treatment at first sign

If any of these symptoms appear, prompt veterinary care is essential.

Contact an exotic-pet vet as soon as possible.

Intestinal parasitism (pinworms, roundworms, flagellates)

SYMPTOMS Soft stools or diarrhoea, weight loss, growth delay, visible parasites in droppings

CAUSE Faecal re-infestation, poor hygiene, stress

PREVENTION Annual faecal exam (especially before hibernation), targeted deworming, remove droppings regularly

Bladder stones (urates)

SYMPTOMS Anorexia, walking backwards, groaning, refusing baths, pasty urates

CAUSE Chronic dehydration, excess protein, diet too dry

PREVENTION Weekly baths, hydrated greens, no animal protein, water always available

Shell pyramiding

SYMPTOMS Dorsal scutes permanently raised in cones (irreversible deformation)

CAUSE Growth too fast, too low humidity in juveniles, excess protein, lack of exercise

PREVENTION 60–70 % humidity for juveniles, very fibrous diet, daily exercise, outdoor exposure as soon as possible

Aural abscess

SYMPTOMS Firm unilateral tympanic swelling (caseous material), often painless, sometimes anorexia

CAUSE Ascending from the Eustachian tube (poor hygiene, hypovitaminosis A, cold/damp environment)

PREVENTION Correct humidity, dietary vitamin A, environmental hygiene; surgical drainage when confirmed



Hibernation

Support this phase carefully and gradually.



Good to know — Hibernation IS ESSENTIAL for a healthy life cycle (regulates reproduction and metabolism). Year 1: prefer a mini-hibernation of 4–6 weeks in box at 8–10 °C; year 2: 2 months; from year 3: full winter 3–5 months. Never hibernate: juvenile < 100 g, sick or gravid animal, > 5 % weight loss in pre-hibernation, or digestive tract not emptied.



Period — October to March/April depending on latitude. True hibernation of 3–5 months in healthy adults.



Temperature — 5–10 °C



Method — Wine cellar or cool dry room, polystyrene-insulated box at least 30 cm high, dry substrate (straw/hay/leaf litter/newspaper), small water container for slight humidity. Rodent protection (fine mesh). Reference weighing before entry.



Full 8-step plan on nacvet.ch

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