



*Raija Hansen

Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*)

*Also “Red Iguanas” and “Blue Iguanas”

Green, but Not Always Mean

The green iguana is a large iguanid lizard indigenous to much of Central and South America that ranges from green, olive green, brown, or sometimes reddish in color, sometimes with darker reddish-brown bands along the side, and dark bands on the tail. Green iguanas can also occur in several color phases depending on their locality and populations, with “red iguanas” being reddish, reddish-orange, to orangeish-brown, while “blue iguanas”, not to be confused with some *Cyclura iguana* species, can be a lighter teal to turquoise blue or bluish-green. A large, loose dewlap, distinctive jowls, and single row of dorsal spines also characterize the green iguana. Like some other lizards, green iguanas have a vestigial third eye atop their heads that detect changes in overhead light. Green iguanas are an arboreal to semi-arboreal species, where they will often bask, thermoregulate, and forage for food both in trees and vegetation, as well as on the ground often near water. ***Green iguanas are very popular reptile pets, but please research the size, husbandry, and housing needs beforehand. Given proper care, green iguanas can live for 15 to 25 years or more. Green iguana care is not simple by any means, and this care sheet should not be considered complete or exhaustive, but rather a starting guide to the essentials and the basics. Please see the additional resources and information for far more detailed aspects of green iguana husbandry.***

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Iguanidae

Genus: *Iguana*

Species: *Iguana iguana**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

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Lifespan and Longevity

Given the correct care and husbandry, green iguanas may reach longevity of 15 to 25 years or more. Unfortunately, they see high mortality due to improper care, housing, and overall setups and environmental conditions.

Distribution and Habitat

Green iguanas are indigenous to Mexico and much of Central America, the Caribbean, and much of South America, but have been introduced in many other places around the world as well including south Florida and Puerto Rico. Green iguanas occupy a variety of habitats, often near water including tropical to sub-tropical rainforests and woodlands, savannahs, and near human habitations as well.

Conservation Status

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD), but likely Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Hatchling green iguanas begin at approximately 12 to 18 inches. Most adult green iguanas can reach 5 to 7 feet, or 54 to 84 inches depending on their age, sex, and growth rate and level of husbandry.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Younger or smaller iguanas 18" or less can be maintained in a minimum of a three foot by two foot by two foot enclosure, but will outgrow these accommodations and require accordingly larger housing. Larger iguanas should be housed in a minimum of a six foot enclosure by at least three feet by about six feet. Custom designed enclosures are available as well, and are perhaps the best choices for maintaining most large iguanas species in. Acceptable substrates for green iguanas can include coconut fibers, orchid bark, or chemical and pesticide free topsoil or potting soil. Green iguanas are arboreal lizards, and will climb when provided the opportunity. They require sufficient enclosure height with ample basking, and climbing spaces including sturdy branches, shelves, and other perches. Humidity levels should also be kept at moderate levels with this species at around 60 to 80%. Younger iguanas may require additional retreats such as hide boxes, log or rock hides, or artificial foliage to feel secure. A sturdy, easily cleaned and disinfected food, water, and litter dish should all also be provided as well. Many iguanas can even become litter trained with some time and patience. Although adult green iguanas derive most of their hydration from their foods, also be sure to provide a supplemental water periodically as well in the form of a large water dish or pan. For added hydration and humidity, these iguanas can also be misted and/or soaked in lukewarm water for at least 15 to 20 minutes weekly as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal ambient temperatures would be mid 80's degrees F, with a basking temperature of about 120 degrees F. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of green iguanas in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and

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other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. Do not allow your iguana to come into contact with any heating element. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. ***More detailed housing and enclosure recommendations for green iguanas and other large lizards that are beyond the scope of this care sheet can and should be researched further by any prospective pet owner.***

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Herbivorous; In the wild, green iguanas are primarily herbivorous, feeding on a variety of plant materials including leafy greens, flowers, fruits, vegetable matter, and occasionally insects or other invertebrates. Green iguanas have a large variety of dietary requirements that should be met if kept in captivity. Many commercialized iguana diets are available, and can be used. Chopped, store bought fruits and vegetables are also typically relished by green iguanas, and can include mustard greens, collard and turnip greens, green beans, kale, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, as well as many other choices. Pesticide, or chemical free dandelions and other select weeds can also be given. Absolutely avoid diets high in protein, as such diets can and do lead to gout, renal disease, and other disorders seen in iguanas. Calcium and vitamin D3 supplements are also recommended as part of a healthy green iguana diet. Feeding frequency depends on age, size, and overall health of the animal, but typically should be at minimum every other day. Without the proper diet and amounts of nutrients and supplementation, all iguana species can be very susceptible to Metabolic Bone Disease (or MBD), a debilitating bone and growth disorder, other health and nutritional maladies, or even death in extremely severe cases. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Green iguanas are animals that require gentle, deliberate, and regular handling in order to become accustomed to being handled. As hatchlings, green iguanas are typically not aggressive, but can be somewhat delicate and skittish initially, and should be handled carefully to prevent injury. Larger and older iguanas can be safely handled using a variety of techniques that adequately support the animal's weight distribution and/or that restrain movements if needed or depending on the disposition of the animal to be handled. A captive born and raised green iguana can become a very docile and personable adult animal to maintain. However, other specimens, such as male iguanas can become aggressive and territorial and require much more careful and experienced handling. ***More detailed handling techniques for green iguanas and other large lizards that are beyond the scope of this care sheet can and should be researched further.***

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Additional Green Iguana Resources

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Green Iguana Society

<http://www.greenigsociety.org/careinfo.htm>

Pet IguanaCare.org

<http://petiguanacare.org/>

IguanaResource

<http://www.iguanaresource.org/whatdoiguanaseat.html>

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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