



Spiny Tailed Iguanas *Genus Ctenosaura sp.*

- Spiny tailed iguanas are small to large species of iguana that can vary greatly in size, color and pattern depending on species. They may range in color from grayish white, tan, brown, to grayish brown, sometimes with several dark vertical bands or stripes. There is also a low row of dorsal spines on most species from behind the head to their tail or hind quarters. The most diagnostic feature of these iguanas are their spiny, keeled scales on the tail.
- Depending on the species, spiny tailed iguanas range from the dry forests and rocky semi arid environments of Mexico through much of Central America.
- Like some other lizards, spiny tailed iguanas have a vestigial third eye atop their heads that detect changes in overhead light.
- Popular species include the Black Spiny Tailed Iguana (*C. similis*), Club Tailed Iguana (*C. quinquecarinata*), and Mexican Spiny Tailed Iguana (*C. pectinata*).
- ***As with other iguanas, spiny tailed iguanas must require research into their potential adult size, husbandry, and housing needs beforehand. Given proper care, spiny tailed iguanas can live for 15-25 years or more.***
- ***Iguana husbandry 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 spiny tailed iguana husbandry.***

Size

Hatchlings begin at approximately 12-18 inches or smaller. Depending on the species, adult spiny tailed iguanas can range from 10-12" for the smallest species, up to 4 ½ to 5 feet in the largest species.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. A hatchling iguana can be started off in a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but will outgrow these quarters and require accordingly larger housing. Enclosure sizes and requirements vary depending on the size and species of spiny tailed iguana being kept. Smaller species 18" or less can be maintained in a 36" 24" X 24" enclosure (or smaller where appropriate depending on the age and size of the animal). Larger species or specimens should be housed in a minimum of a 48" to 72" X 24" X 30" enclosure. Custom designed enclosures are available as well, with acceptable substrates including cypress mulch, non toxic newspaper or paper towel, or indoor/outdoor carpeting folded and taped to prevent unraveling. Spiny tailed iguanas are more terrestrial lizards, but will climb when provided the opportunity, and require sufficient enclosure height with ample basking, and climbing spaces including sturdy branches, shelves, and other perches. Younger iguanas may require additional retreats such as hideboxes or artificial foliage. A sturdy, easily cleaned and disinfected food, water, and litter dish should all also be provided as well (iguanas can even become litter trained with patience). Spiny tailed iguanas will also enjoy regular misting as well, and obtain much of their hydration from this method as well.

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal ambient temperatures would be 75-85 degrees F, with a basking temperature of about 95-105 degrees F. Spiny tailed iguanas require overhead UVB and UVA incandescent and fluorescent lighting to thrive. Do not allow your iguana to come into contact with any heating element. 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 2-3 months. ***More detailed housing and enclosure recommendations for spiny tailed 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

In the wild, spiny tailed iguanas are primarily omnivorous, feeding on a variety of plant materials including leafy greens, flowers, fruits, vegetable matter, and occasionally insects or other invertebrates and other small animals.

As with other iguanas, spiny tailed 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 these iguanas, and can include mustard greens, collard and turnip greens, green beans, kale, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, as well as many other choices and mixed greens. Feeder insects and other invertebrates that can be provide can include appropriately sized crickets, roaches, silkworms, hornworms, mealworms, and waxworms. Frozen thawed rodents will also occasionally be eaten as well. 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 spiny tailed iguana diet. Iceberg lettuce can be given, but contains very little nutrients. Feeding frequency depends on age and size of the animal, and should be at minimum every other day. ***More detailed diets and feeding recommendations for spiny tailed 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.***

Handling

Many spiny tailed iguanas may be skittish and/or irascible animals to maintain, particularly wild caught animals, although captive bred and born animals can become much more traceable and handleable. Spiny tailed iguanas are animals that require gentle, deliberate, and regular handling in order to become accustomed to being handled. As hatchlings, these 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 spiny tailed 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 these 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