

# Russian Tortoise

*Testudo horsfieldi*



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

This small tortoise enjoys burrowing and roaming about its habitat. They can become tame and friendly with gentle handling. With a long life span, expect your Russian tortoise to be a companion for life.



### Is a Russian tortoise the right companion animal for you?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check "Yes" or "No" after reading the following statements:

1. I realize that this tortoise can be a long-term commitment.
2. The tortoise can spend occasional time outdoors in a secure habitat.
3. I can keep a tortoise safe from dogs, cats, ferrets and wild animals.
4. I can commit to providing proper care for this tortoise.
5. A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.

If you answered "Yes" to most of these statements, a Russian tortoise may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a Russian tortoise and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

**Average Size** 6 to 8 inches long

**Life Span** 50+ years or more with proper care

**Diet** Diet should be high fiber, low protein and calcium rich to ensure good digestive tract function and growth. Include dark leafy vegetables with high fiber levels. Fruits should be given very sparingly as they tend to cause diarrhea. Give chlorine-free water daily

**Feeding** Feed tortoises vegetables daily; vegetables should be chopped into small pieces  
Fruit (reds and yellows) and wheat bread crust may be offered occasionally  
Dust food daily with a pure calcium supplement and once or twice weekly with a vitamin/mineral supplement.

**Housing** Size – **Indoor enclosure** should be at least 36"x12".  
**Outdoor enclosure** at least 48"x48" with a secure screened cover to allow sunshine but provide protection, the walls should be high enough that the tortoise cannot escape and buried at least 12" into the ground, as they will dig.  
Substrate – Tortoises are notorious for eating substrate, use something that is digestible such as rabbit or alfalfa pellets; substrate should be deep enough for the tortoises to burrow into. Do not use coarse substrates such as sand or gravel that can scratch the shell.  
Habitat – Keep habitat arid and dry; with shaded areas to escape direct sunlight; humid climates may need to use a dehumidifier, cool climates require supplemental heating. Provide a hiding area, such as a cave or hide box filled with additional substrate.  
Temperature – Temperature gradient (85° F. for the warm end and 75° F. for the cool end); recommend an under tank heat pad; use an incandescent light or spot light as primary heat source over one side of the tank  
Lighting – Provide UVB rays with full spectrum fluorescent lighting for 12 to 14 hours a day  
Water – Provide a shallow container large enough for the tortoise to soak in and drink from; replace with clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water daily  
Do not house different species of reptiles together

- Recommended Supplies**
- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate size habitat        | <input type="checkbox"/> Shallow water bowl                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Food bowl                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate substrate           | <input type="checkbox"/> Humidity gauge                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Thermometer                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full spectrum fluorescent light | <input type="checkbox"/> Incandescent basking light or ceramic heater | <input type="checkbox"/> Calcium and vitamin/mineral supplement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about tortoises            |   |   |

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### Normal Behavior and Interaction

Active, friendly, and outgoing; will become tame with gentle handling  
Hides in objects and burrows into substrate  
Adept at climbing and digging to escape; make sure the habitat is secure; it is natural for them to move constantly in the wild, so they may run into sides of tank repeatedly; allow your tortoise to spend time outside in a secure habitat

### Habitat Maintenance

Pick up leftover food and scoop feces out of the substrate daily  
Thoroughly clean the tank at least once week: set tortoise aside in a secure habitat; scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3% bleach solution; rinse thoroughly with water, removing all smell of bleach; dry the tank and furnishings; and add clean substrate

### Grooming and Hygiene

Weekly water soaks with water level no deeper than the mid-point between the bottom of the tortoise's shell and its top  
Always wash your hands before and after touching your tortoise or habitat contents to help prevent *Salmonella* and other infectious diseases

### Signs of a Healthy Animal

- Active and alert
- Healthy shell
- Healthy skin
- Eats regularly
- Clear, bright eyes
- Clear nose and vent

### Common Health Issues

Health Issue (alpha)	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Metabolic Bone/Vitamin Deficiency	Inability to absorb calcium due to insufficient UVB light. If untreated, can lead to a disorder characterized by deformities and softened bones. Swollen limbs and lethargy.	Provide ample UVB lighting and consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Respiratory Disease	Labored breathing or runny nose. Can be caused by cold, damp habitat, or infectious disease.	Ensure habitat is appropriately heated and consult your veterinarian.
Ticks and Mites	Parasites on the skin. Can transmit disease.	Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Gastro-intestinal Disease	Runny stools, caked or smeared stool around the vent area, and loss of appetite caused by bacterial or parasitic infection	Consult your exotic animal veterinarian

### Red Flags

- Eye, nose, or mouth discharge
- Lethargic
- Abnormal feces
- Soft, discolored, or rough spots on shell
- Bumps or spots on skin
- Sneezing, mouth breathing, runny nose

If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.

### Sources

*The ASPCA Complete Guide to Pet Care* by David L. Carroll  
*The Guide to Owning a Tortoise* by Jerry G. Wallis  
*Turtles and Tortoises for Dummies* by Liz Palika

**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.