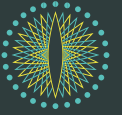


Indian Star Tortoise

All Reptiles, all the time.



Introduction

The Indian Star Tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*) is one of the most recognizable tortoises in the world, admired for its striking yellow starburst pattern radiating across each scute of its shell. Native to the dry grasslands and scrub forests of India, Sri Lanka, and parts of Pakistan, this species is generally shy, peaceful, and surprisingly hardy when provided with consistent husbandry. While they remain relatively small compared to many tortoise species, they are a long lived commitment that can become wonderful companions for decades. Indian Star Tortoises are often considered an intermediate species due to their sensitivity to prolonged cold temperatures and poor humidity management, but with proper care they are incredibly rewarding animals to keep.

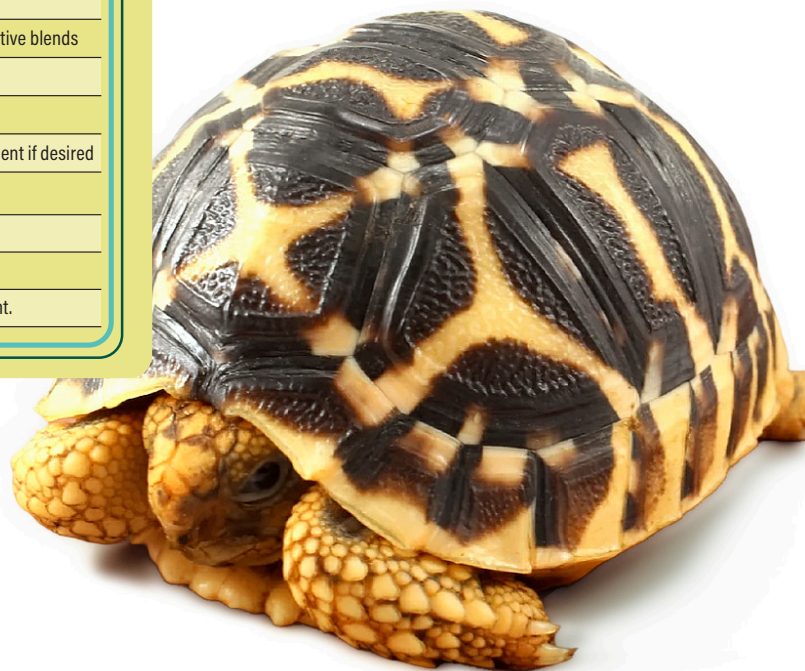
Care sheets are only to be taken as guidelines. Just as with all animals, each reptile will have unique traits & personalities special to the individual animal that may require adaptation in their husbandry & care. The following care sheet will address basic requirements but as the primary caretaker of your pet, we encourage you to take notice of your pet's behaviours and preferences and make adjustments as they grow with you & your family. Please also keep in mind that unlike mammals, most reptiles change their behaviour according to the weather seasons even if you keep them indoors all year round.



CHEAT SHEET

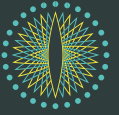
Indian Star Tortoise

COMMON NAME	Indian Star Tortoise
SCIENTIFIC NAME	<i>Geochelone elegans</i>
NATURAL LOCATION	India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan
HABITAT (WILD)	Dry grasslands, scrub forests, thorny woodland
CAPTIVE ENCLOSURE	20-40gal for hatchlings/juveniles, 4'x2' and up for adults
SUBSTRATE	Moisture retaining soil blends, Forest Floor, Reptisoil, Bioactive blends
TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE	Cooler: 78-85°F (26-29°C), Nighttime: 72-78°F (22-26°C)
BASKING TEMPERATURE	95-100°F (35-38°C)
UVB LIGHTING	Essential. 10-12 hours per day, +/-2hrs for seasonal adjustment if desired
HUMIDITY	50-70%
AVERAGE ADULT SIZE	6-10 inches
CAPTIVE LIFESPAN	60 years +
FUN FACT	Every shell has a unique star pattern, much like a fingerprint.



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Housing

Enclosure: Indian Star Tortoises benefit from large enclosures that allow them to roam, graze, and explore throughout the day. Hatchlings and juveniles generally do very well in a 20-40 gallon terrarium, while adults should eventually be upgraded into a custom enclosure measuring at least 4'x2'x2'. Larger enclosures are always welcomed provided they can still be heated and furnished properly. We always remind keepers that enclosure size alone does not determine good husbandry. An enclosure that is too large but unable to maintain proper temperatures, humidity, and basking areas can actually be less beneficial than a slightly smaller enclosure that is properly designed. This species appreciates open walking areas combined with patches of cover where they can retreat when they feel insecure.

Substrate: Choosing the proper substrate is one of the most important aspects of keeping Indian Star Tortoises healthy. Unlike many people believe, these tortoises actually benefit from moderate humidity throughout much of their lives, particularly when young. A moisture retaining substrate such as Zoo Med Reptisoil, Zoo Med Forest Floor, Zilla Jungle Mix, or a well balanced bioactive soil blend works extremely well.

Loose substrate often receives criticism due to impaction concerns, but healthy tortoises maintained under proper temperatures and hydration rarely experience issues. The greater concern is often keeping them too dry for extended periods. Bioactive substrates also provide excellent enrichment by allowing natural digging and foraging behaviours.

Temperature & Humidity: Indian Star Tortoises require a warm enclosure with a basking area between 95-100°F (35-38°C). Ambient temperatures should remain between 78-85°F (26-29°C) with nighttime temperatures remaining above 72°F (22°C) whenever possible.

Although they originate from relatively dry regions, they also experience seasonal monsoons and periods of elevated humidity. For this reason, we recommend maintaining humidity around 50-70%, especially for juveniles. Young Stars raised too dry for prolonged periods are significantly more prone to dehydration and shell development problems than those raised with moderate humidity. A humid hide can also be beneficial, especially for hatchlings.

Lighting: High quality UVB lighting is essential for healthy shell development and proper calcium metabolism. Provide UVB lighting for approximately 10-12 hours daily using a reptile specific bulb. Linear fluorescent UVB systems generally provide the most even coverage, although mercury vapour and newer LED UVB systems also perform very well when installed correctly.

Heating can be provided through basking bulbs, ceramic heat emitters, deep heat projectors, or a combination depending on your enclosure size. Larger enclosures often require multiple heat sources to establish a healthy temperature gradient.

Decor: Indian Star Tortoises enjoy exploring obstacles throughout their enclosure. Cork bark, sturdy branches, flat rocks, edible plants, and patches of grass all provide excellent enrichment. Since they are not climbers, avoid tall climbing structures that increase the risk of falling. Multiple shaded areas should always be available so the tortoise can retreat whenever it chooses. Live plants also help maintain humidity while creating a much more natural environment.



Diet

Feeding: Indian Star Tortoises are strict herbivores requiring a high fibre, calcium rich diet. The majority of their nutrition should consist of dark leafy greens including dandelion greens, collard greens, endive, escarole, mustard greens, bok choy, turnip greens, and hibiscus leaves and flowers when available.

Offering a wide variety of greens is far more beneficial than feeding large amounts of only one or two vegetables. Small amounts of grasses and weeds are also excellent additions whenever available. Fruit should only be offered sparingly as an occasional treat, making up less than 10% of the overall diet. High protein foods and animal proteins should be completely avoided.

Supplementation: Calcium remains one of the most important supplements for this species. Calcium powders, cuttlebones, calcium blocks, or liquid calcium supplements may all be used successfully. When proper UVB lighting is provided, additional Vitamin D3 supplementation is generally unnecessary and excessive supplementation should always be avoided. powders and liquid calciums are also acceptable.

Water: Fresh clean water should always be available in a shallow dish that allows easy access for both drinking and soaking. Although Indian Star Tortoises originate from relatively dry environments, they should never be deprived of water. Hatchlings especially benefit from regular opportunities to soak and hydrate.

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Health & Maintenance

Hygiene: Spot clean the enclosure daily by removing feces and leftover food before bacteria has an opportunity to accumulate. Water dishes should be cleaned frequently since tortoises often choose to defecate while soaking. We recommend performing a complete substrate replacement approximately 4 times a year for conventional enclosures. Well established bioactive substrates that have live plants thriving can withstand far less cleaning. Wood décor can be cleaned monthly using hot water before returning it to the enclosure. Large pieces of wood can also be naturally disinfected by placing them outdoors in direct sunlight for several hot summer days. Proper cleanliness greatly reduces the likelihood of respiratory infections, shell infections, and parasite buildup.

Handling: Indian Star Tortoises are naturally shy but generally tolerate gentle handling very well. Young animals may retreat into their shells whenever approached, but with time they often become surprisingly comfortable around their owners and will frequently learn to recognize familiar people.

Handling should always be calm and purposeful. Avoid repeatedly picking them up simply for entertainment, as frequent unnecessary handling can become stressful. Wash your hands before and after handling to help prevent the spread of bacteria.

Behavioural observation: Indian Star Tortoises are most active during the daytime and typically spend their days exploring, grazing, basking, and resting beneath cover. While they are generally quiet animals, they develop individual personalities over time and many become remarkably interactive once they associate their keeper with food.

Monitor your tortoise for changes in appetite, prolonged inactivity outside of seasonal slowdowns, abnormal stools, wheezing, nasal discharge, soft shell growth, or swollen eyes. Like many reptiles, healthy adults may naturally become less active during cooler months even when maintained indoors. Consistent growth, a smooth shell, bright alert eyes, and steady curiosity are all excellent indicators of a healthy tortoise.

Quarantine: Quarantine any new additions to your reptile collection to prevent the spread of diseases.

