

Three-Toed Box Turtle

All Reptiles, all the time.



Introduction

The Three-Toed Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina triunguis*) is a small, terrestrial turtle native to the central and southeastern United States. Named for the three toes on their hind feet (instead of the usual four found in other Box Turtles), they have a domed shell that varies in color from brown to olive with yellow or orange markings. These turtles are known for their big personalities and docile nature, making them a popular choice among more experienced reptile keepers.

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.

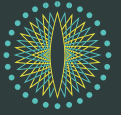


CHEAT SHEET

Three-Toed Box Turtle

COMMON NAME	Three-Toed Box Turtle
SCIENTIFIC NAME	<i>Terrapene carolina triunguis</i>
NATURAL LOCATION	Central and Southeastern United States
HABITAT (WILD)	Woodlots, swamps, floodplains
CAPTIVE ENCLOSURE	20-30gal for hatchlings/juveniles, custom 4'x2' and up for adults
SUBSTRATE	Moisture retaining, diggable. ZM ReptiSoil, ZM Forest Floor, Zilla Jungle Mix, etc
TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE	Cooler: 75-85°F (24-29°C), Nighttime: 65-75°F (18-24°C)
BASKING TEMPERATURE	85-90°F (29-32°C)
UVB LIGHTING	Essential. 12hrs per day, +/- 2hrs for seasonal adjustment if desired
HUMIDITY	60-80%
AVERAGE ADULT SIZE	4-6 inches
CAPTIVE LIFESPAN	50 years +
FUN FACT	Breeders wrap them & place them in refrigerators for winter brumation.





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Housing

Enclosure: Three-Toed Box Turtles are a small but curious animal that will spend much of their time exploring. For this reason, they need ample space in their enclosure to thrive. Juveniles can be comfortably raised in 20-30gal terrariums whereas an adult is best kept in custom built enclosures with a floor space of at least 4 x 2 feet. Custom built enclosures can be built without a top as long as the side boards are high enough to prevent escape. A topless habitat works best for hanging lights overtop but can bring challenges to maintaining humidity.

Substrate: Box Turtles thrive in environments that closely resemble their natural woodland and swampy habitats. In the wild, they often live in areas with a humid, moist substrate that allows for burrowing and natural behaviors like digging. They also love to walk across shallow, slow moving water. To replicate this in captivity, choose substrates that resemble a mixture of dirt and mulch such as mix of coconut fibre, soil blends, cypress mulch, jungle mix, and repti soil. It is important to ensure the substrate does not get too soggy so a false bottom is highly recommended to collect excess water.

Temperature: Three-Toed Box Turtles thrive in temperatures ranging from 75–85°F (24–29°C) during the day, with a basking spot of 85–90°F (29–32°C). Nighttime temperatures can drop to 65–75°F (18–24°C) without issue. Heat should be provided using a ceramic heat emitter, basking bulb, or radiant heat, and heating pads can be used on one side to create a gradient. While they tolerate slight fluctuations, prolonged cold exposure can lead to health issues unless they are undergoing controlled brumation.

Humidity: Unlike other Box Turtle subspecies, Three-Toed Box Turtles prefer slightly higher humidity levels, ranging from 60–80%. This can be maintained by misting the enclosure daily, providing a damp substrate, and offering a humid hide. Proper ventilation is crucial to prevent mold and respiratory infections.

Lighting: Provide UVB lighting for 12 hours a day to support proper calcium and vitamin D3 metabolism and overall health. Use a full-spectrum UVB bulb specifically designed for reptiles. UVB lighting can be provided in the form of linear fluorescent, compact fluorescent, mercury vapour, and more recent technology provides UVB lighting in LED form as well. Compact fluorescents are not recommended for larger enclosures as the quality is not high enough. Heating bulbs can be provided by basking heat bulbs, heat emitters, or deep heat projectors. The amount of lighting you need will depend on the size of your setup and temperature of the room the enclosure stays in.

Decor: The enclosure should be designed to mimic a woodland or forest floor environment, providing plenty of hiding spots, logs, leaf litter, and live or artificial plants. Flat rocks can be added for basking, and hollow logs or caves make excellent hiding areas. A mix of shaded and open areas will allow the turtle to regulate its body temperature effectively.



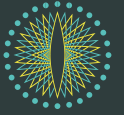
Diet

Feeding: Three-Toed Box Turtles are omnivores, requiring a diverse diet that includes both animal protein and plant matter. Their diet should consist of approximately 50% protein, 30% vegetables and greens, and 10–20% fruits. Protein sources include earthworms, crickets, mealworms, superworms, snails, slugs, silk worms, hornworms, waxworms, butterworms, and occasionally pinky mice. Dark, leafy greens such as collard greens, dandelion greens, and mustard greens should make up a significant portion of their plant-based intake, along with vegetables like squash, carrots, and bell peppers. Fruits, including strawberries, bananas, melons, and blueberries, can be offered in moderation as a treat. A few brands such as Zoo Med make excellent commercially ready pellet foods blended with freeze dried fruit and flower treats that are specially formulated for Box Turtles and obtain excellent nutrition for your convenience. Providing a variety of nutrient rich foods ensures a well balanced diet, supporting their overall health, shell development, and longevity.

Supplementation: Provide calcium supplements to support shell health in the form of calcium blocks or cuttlebones. We advise against D3 supplements as long as you are using the correct UVB lighting but if desired, you can provide calcium powder without vitamin D.

Water: They require fresh water daily for drinking and soaking. They absolutely love sitting in water and is beneficial to keep them hydrated.





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Health & Maintenance

Hygiene: Spot clean your enclosure on a daily basis to prevent bacteria build up and general cleanliness. Box Turtles often defecate in their clean water and it is essential to change this water frequently. We recommend a full substrate change once per season or as needed for juveniles and twice a year or as needed for adults. The frequency of substrate change will depend on how diligent you are with spot cleaning. Wood and plant décor can be washed monthly or bi monthly with hot water and dish soap and put back into place.

Handling: Three-Toed Box Turtles are generally docile but do not enjoy frequent handling. While they may tolerate occasional handling, excessive interaction can cause stress. When necessary, they should be picked up gently with both hands, supporting their body. Wash your hands before and after handling to prevent the spread of bacteria.

Behavioural observation: These turtles are curious, active, and surprisingly intelligent. They often explore their surroundings, foraging for food, and are known to recognize their keepers over time. When startled, they may retract fully into their shell, using their hinged plastron to close tightly for protection. Some individuals enjoy burrowing or soaking for extended periods, especially in warm weather. They are most active during the morning and late afternoon, avoiding the hottest part of the day. Outdoors, they will seek shaded areas when temperatures rise. During cooler months, some individuals may slow down or attempt brumation if temperatures drop significantly. Their gentle and inquisitive nature makes them a delight to observe, but they thrive best when provided with a spacious and enriching environment.

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

