

Semi-Aquatic Turtles

Slider, Map, Chicken, Mud, Musk, Blandings, Painted turtles, etc.

CAGING: An ordinary aquarium will do as housing for turtles. The aquarium should be at least three times as long as the largest turtle; if keeping more than one turtle per tank, allow 5 times each turtle's area (5 x length of turtle x width of turtle) for each additional turtle. The water should be at least as deep as the largest turtle is wide. The water portion should be at least half the tank, but there must also be a dry portion. The dry part can be as simple as a platform resting on two blocks, but it must be easily accessible and smooth.

LIGHTING: All turtles must have natural sunlight or an artificial equivalent, such as a Vita-Lite™. They require the ultraviolet rays such sources produce in order to metabolize vitamins. The light should be hung no more than 12 inches above the dry platform, with no glass or plastic between the light and the tank. Ordinary glass and plastic block the ultraviolet light. The light should be on at least 2 hours each day.

WATER: These turtles do not require a separate water dish; they will drink from the tank. Therefore, the water must be kept clean. If you choose to feed them in their home tanks, you will need a filter system. Get one at least twice as large as would be needed for a tank of fish the same size as your turtle tank. Even so, you will have to manually change the water, approximately once a week. If the water is not filtered, you will need to change it every other day.

TEMPERATURE: These turtles require moderate temperatures. The water should be heated to 72 to 82 F degrees by a protected aquarium heater. The dry portion should have a spot light hung above it to provide a warmer (85- 90 degrees F) basking spot during the day. If your turtle is inactive, it's too cold.

FOOD: Most semi-aquatic turtles are omnivorous, and will enjoy small amounts of vegetable foods as well as meat. Their main food source is fish, preferably live. Many enjoy worms, snails (whole, including the shell), small frogs, and baby mice. They may also take floating food pellets formulated specifically for turtles. The pellets are both convenient and a balanced diet. The pellets, worms, and snails are particularly good for growing, young turtles, as they are high in calcium. These turtles must be fed in the water; they will not eat on land. Many people find it easier to feed their turtles in a separate tank, leaving them there long enough to allow the turtles to defecate. This makes it much easier to keep the turtle's home clean.

HEALTH: Cages must be kept clean. Anti-bacterial cleaning solutions are recommended. One ounce of bleach in ten ounces of water is one such solution. Rinse the cage thoroughly with clean water after using any solution. Don't use Lysol, Lestoil or other such oil-based cleaners; they are deadly to reptiles.

HANDLING: Turtles generally don't enjoy being handled, but don't mind it too much. Most will simply pull their heads in and flail their legs. Some will bite; sometimes with serious results. And a few will release a foul smelling fluid; hence the name Musk or Stinkpot turtles. (They stop doing that, eventually.) In any case, it is not good to handle them too often, as the stress can lead to the turtle becoming ill. Be careful not to drop them; a cracked shell can cause deadly infections. Always wash your hands after handling your turtle, before touching anything else. This will prevent any chance of your becoming ill due to bacteria carried by the turtle.

This Care Sheet was originally written by New England Herpetological Society. It can be found at www.neherp.com or www.AnimalCityInc.com

Enfield
(860) 745-9596

Vernon
(860) 872-3574

