



# Brighton Veterinary Surgery

ABN: 80 940 972 044

**Dr Vanessa Harkess**

BVSc (Hons1) MANZCVS (Avian Health)

**Dr Rebecca Taylor**

BSc (Vet Biol) BVMS

**Dr Stephanie Shaw**

DVM MANZCVS (Zoo Med) PhD

## CENTRAL BEARDED DRAGON CARE

### HEATING

*All physiological functions in reptiles rely on heat.*

This includes appetite, activity levels, immune function, reproductive function and digestion. Heating should be provided for 24hr a day, 365 days a year.

If you are worried about providing light during the night or interrupted sleep for you or your reptile, a ceramic globe is a good option as this provides heating without visible light.

Never used electrically heated "hot rocks", as these can lead to very serious thermal burns. Reptiles have evolved to absorb radiant heat from above (e.g. the sun), therefore are darker on top and lighter under their belly – they have very poor heat and pain receptors under their belly so can sit and burn themselves without knowing.

An elevated basking spot should be offered at around 45°C, the hot end should stay between 36-38°C. The cool end should sit between 17-20°C, year round. If you are unable to achieve a cool enough cool end, you may require a bigger enclosure – as a general rule, the larger the enclosure the better. It is advisable that even very tame reptile do not spend significant time outside of these temperature gradients, therefore should not be allowed free-range around the house, spending more than a few hours outside of the enclosure etc, at a time.

Enclosure temperatures should be measured daily to ensure the appropriate thermal gradient is provided. Some thermostats have 2 probes which records the hottest and coolest temperatures over the last 24 hours, these are ideal. As with all electrical devices, thermostats can dysfunction – so a separate thermometer is recommended to ensure that the temperature readings on the thermostat are accurate. Cooling reptiles during the winter months is not recommended, as it often leads to prolonged cooling which may induce immunosuppression and lead to disease. Provide a water bowl in the cool end – large enough to bathe in. Providing basking areas and hides is also a good idea to keep your dragon happy, as well as some vertical space for basking and climbing.

### UVB LIGHT

There is no substitute for direct access to real, unfiltered sunlight daily. UVB is essential for calcium metabolism, and calcium metabolism is important for skeletal health, muscle health and for digestion.

We encourage taking your reptile outside for supervised access to the sun as much as possible (e.g. Minimum 30-60 minutes 3-5 times weekly). Some people set up a separate outdoor basking enclosure for this purpose to ensure that they are safe from predation while meeting their UVB requirements. Ensure that shade is provided in order to avoid over-heating.

You must provide your reptile with access to artificial UVB with a UVB globe during daylight hours (8-12 hours), all year round. It is important to note that UVB light itself, is invisible, for this reason it is recommended to change the UVB globe every 6 months – even if it is still giving off visible light. An alternative option is to purchase your own UVB reader to ensure that output is adequate at the time of purchase and for the lifespan of the globe, or to take to a pet product supplier for UVB output testing. UVB doesn't travel through glass, perspex etc. so it is vital to ensure nothing is in between your UV globe and your reptile – this means that the reptile gets no functional UV from sunlight through a window. For the globe to be effective, it needs to be placed within 30-40cm from your reptile. Even wire mesh can reduce UVB by 10-50% (black mesh less so than silver).

### CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTATION

UVB is absorbed through the skin and works with calcium in the diet to build a healthy and strong skeleton. So that the UVB can do the best job possible it is important that all live insects and salad are dusted with calcium carbonate dust (without phosphorous or vitamin D) *immediately* prior to feeding (crickets can clean off calcium within 18 seconds!). We recommend REPASHY SuperCal No D for this. Insects have an upside-down calcium: phosphorous ratio, so dusting them with calcium carbonate powder helps to correct this ratio so that the dragon's diet is more balanced. We recommend feeding the insects Wombaroo Insect Booster or REPASHY Bug Burger to ensure they contain vital minerals and vitamins when fed to your pet. Wombaroo and REPASHY also manufacture a balanced vitamin supplement/meal replacement that we recommend you use at least once a week.

## FEEDING

Adult bearded dragons are technically omnivores, however much more than half of their diet should comprise of vegetable matter. Vegetables can be provided every day or every second day. Leafy greens (kale, dandelion, nasturtiums, Chinese greens), chopped salad and vegetables can be provided. Ensure that vegetables are dusted with calcium carbonate powder +/- a vitamin and mineral supplement. Vegetables should not be grated or cut into small pieces – larger pieces are better. Avoid vegetables that are very high in fibre and sugar. Cooked or pureed vegetables are not ideal for maintaining dental health. Fruit should make up no more than 5-10% of the diet. It is important to provide tough native plants and flowers to try to replicate a wild diet and to maintain dental health – e.g. Grevillea, Correa, Crowea, *Eremophila* sp., and *Hemiandra pungens*. Some individuals require tooth brushing with a dental solution (eg. Hexarinse) and a cotton tip 2-3 times a week as dental disease in captive dragons is very common.

Live insects such as wood roaches or crickets can be provided up to 3 times a week, limiting the number fed to 3-6 insects – this helps to avoid overfeeding, avoids chitin (exoskeleton) obstruction, and kidney damage from high protein meals. Insects may be fed up to 3 times a week. Mealworms are a treat food only – limit feeding mealworms to 1-2 worms up to twice a week to keep the liver happy, and to prevent obesity.

(N.B Always count how many insects are given, to ensure that none remain in the enclosure, as these can cause wounds to your pet. Never leave a debilitated reptile alone with live insects or worms.)

## HYGIENE

Newspaper is a clean and inexpensive substrate, and is safe if ingested in small amounts. F10 (strength 1:250) is hospital and reptile grade disinfectant and is what we recommend for your pet at home to kill bacteria, fungus and viruses. Spot cleaning following toileting can be done with F10, and a full clean of the enclosure should be performed monthly. During a “full clean” remove all of the enclosure substrate and enclosure furniture and clean with hot soapy water and detergent (a detergent is not the same as a disinfectant), then rinse. Once rinsed, spray furniture with F10 disinfectant, and prior to replacing the furniture, spray and wipe the internal surfaces of the enclosure.

We recommend keeping pet bearded dragons individually, as in the wild they are solitary animals and only come together to share resources, e.g. at times of reproduction. Central bearded dragons housed together are at risk of life-threatening injuries due to fighting, even in dragons that have “always got along well”.

It is very important to have a general health check every 6-12 months to ensure that a thorough physical examination and routine blood work are performed.

There are some great resources available at the Reptile Doctor online shop:

<http://www.thereptiledoctorshop.com.au/collections/books>

We recommend the book “A Guide to... Australian Dragons in Captivity”, and “A Guide to... Health and Disease in Reptiles and Amphibians”.

**470 Beaconsfield Terrace Brighton Q 4017**  
**Phone: (07) 3269 2223 - Fax: (07) 3269 2366**  
**reception@brightonvetqld.com.au**