



Owning a Pet Green Iguana

General Information

The green iguana is a popular lizard pet. Mature males (2 years and older) are easily distinguished from females as they have larger and more pronounced femoral pores on the inner aspects of the thighs than females. These pores are openings of glands that are used in marking behaviors. Under proper conditions, adults can reach several pounds and grow to 6 feet in length. Therefore, proper provisions must be made for a larger enclosure as the pet ages. Sexual maturity is reached by 2 years of age. Females can lay eggs without a male, although the eggs will be infertile and not hatch. With proper care, your iguana can live 10-15 years. Spaying and neutering can be done for conditions such as chronic egg laying in females or aggressiveness in mature males.

How do iguanas differ anatomically from other pets?

- Iguanas do not have diaphragms; they use muscles located between their ribs (intercostal muscles) for breathing.
- Iguanas have a three-chambered heart; dogs, cats, and people have four chambers in their hearts.
- Iguanas have a renal portal blood system, where blood from the hindlimbs is filtered by the kidneys before reaching the general circulation. This means toxins from the rear limbs (as could occur from wounds on the legs) as well as drugs injected into the rear legs would probably be filtered before entering the general circulation.
- Iguanas excrete uric acid as their main waste product of protein metabolism (dogs, cats, and people excrete urea). This allows them to adapt to desert environments where water supply might be restricted.
- Males have two reproductive organs called hemipenes.
- Iguanas have a cloaca, which receives secretions from the urinary, gastrointestinal, and reproductive systems.

- The skin is covered with scales and is usually shed in patches, unlike the situation in snakes where the skin is usually shed in one piece.
- Unlike many reptiles, iguanas have a urinary bladder.

How do I select an iguana?

Most owners buy iguanas locally from a pet store, although mail ordering from reptile breeders is also common. If you buy a pet through the mail, make sure you know what you're getting! Ask about a guarantee if the pet isn't what you want.

Young, captive-raised animals make the best pets. Older imported animals are harder to tame, may harbor internal parasites, and often suffer from the stress of captivity. Avoid sick-looking animals. Don't try to be a "Good Samaritan." Many sickly-looking iguanas are terminally ill. Trying to nurse a sick iguana back to health after purchasing it will rarely work. Just the stress of a new environment is often enough to kill a sick iguana.

Start out right with a healthy pet. Avoid lizards that appear skinny, have loose skin or sunken eyes, and appear inactive or lethargic. A healthy iguana is usually bright green, active, and alert. The vent or cloaca should be clean and free of wetness or stool stuck to it. If you can GENTLY open the mouth (tapping lightly on the snout with a finger often works), there should be a small amount of clear saliva present, and a bright pink tongue and oral cavity. Mucus that is cloudy or "cottage cheese" in appearance is a sign of mouth rot, as is redness or pinpoint hemorrhages on the mucus membranes. Always inquire about the guarantee in case the iguana is found to be unhealthy.

My iguana looks healthy? Does he need to see the veterinarian?

Within 48 hours of your purchase, your iguana should be examined by a qualified reptile veterinarian. The visit includes determining the animal's weight, as well as checking for lumps and bumps. The animal is examined for signs of dehydration and starvation. A fecal test is done to check for internal parasites. Many veterinarians consider all iguanas (even those bred in captivity) to have pinworms, so your iguana may be routinely dewormed for these parasites (these pinworms are not transmissible to people). The oral cavity is examined for signs of infectious stomatitis (mouth rot). No vaccines are required for iguanas. Your doctor may recommend blood tests, cultures, or radiographs (X-rays) to check for other diseases. If all turns out well, your iguana will be given a clean bill of health. Like all pets, iguanas should be examined and have their feces tested for parasites during the annual visit

