



Feeding your Pet Turtle

What do turtles eat?

Turtles are both herbivorous and carnivorous, which means that they eat both plant and animal based foods. As a guideline, your turtle's diet should be about 50% plant-based material and 50% animal-based material. Be sure to discuss a specific diet for your turtle with your veterinarian.

How often should I feed my turtle?

Most young turtles eat daily; older turtles can be fed daily or every other day, depending upon each pet's individual appetite.

What are some types of plant material I can feed my turtle?

Most (80-90%) of the plant material should be flowers and vegetables, and only 10-20% should be fruits.

As a rule, anything green and leafy should make up a large part of the diet. Yellow and orange vegetables should also be included. Avoid fiber-rich, vitamin-deficient vegetables including lettuce and celery; their composition is mainly fiber and water with little vitamins or minerals.

Acceptable vegetables include collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, alfalfa hay or chow, bok choy, kale, parsley, spinach (in small amounts), bell peppers, green beans, green peas, corn, okra, cactus, various squashes, sweet potatoes, cabbage or broccoli (also in small amounts), and flowers such as carnations, hibiscus, and roses (avoid azaleas as they are toxic).

Vegetables can be offered cooked or raw (thoroughly wash raw vegetables); experiment with your turtle to see if he prefers his vegetables raw or cooked. Flowers can be home grown or purchased from floral shops. Often, floral shops throw out older, wilting flowers. While these may be unacceptable for sale to the public, reptile owners can often get them for free. It is wise to be sure that no chemicals have been applied to the flowers or water.

Fruit can include apples, pears, bananas, grapes, peaches, kiwis, and melons. Fruits that are particularly healthy include figs (which contain calcium), papaya, raspberries and strawberries.

What are some acceptable animal-based protein foods I can offer my turtle?

If you and your veterinarian decide that animal-based protein sources are acceptable, some appropriate foods include crickets, sardines (drained), tofu, hard-boiled eggs, moths, and mealworms. Dog and cat food contains too much Vitamin D and fat and should not be fed. Reptile pellets, bird pellets, trout chow, and other fish chows are excellent protein sources.

Live prey, such as crickets and worms, should either be raised by the owner, retrieved from a nearby field, or purchased from a pet store or reptile breeder. Care must be exercised when collecting insects, especially from the home garden as fertilizers and insecticides can be toxic to turtles.

Do I need to give my turtle vitamins?

It is recommended by many veterinarians to LIGHTLY sprinkle all the food offered to the turtle with a calcium powder (calcium gluconate, lactate, or carbonate). A LIGHT weekly sprinkling of a good reptile vitamin on the food is also recommended.

Over-supplementation with vitamins and minerals can cause problems in turtles. Check with your veterinarian for specific recommendations about the need to supplement your pet's diet.

What about water?

Fresh water in a crock that won't easily tip over should be available at all times. Turtles will not only drink from the water bowl but will often bathe in it as well (although it is perfectly acceptable to mist the turtle with water a few times a week too). Make sure the water stays clean; many turtles love to eliminate in their water bowl as well as drink from it.