



Introduction to Skink Care

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The blue-tongued skink is a mild-mannered lizard that is native to the semi-desert and open woodland regions of Australia, New Guinea, and Tasmania. They are social pets with lots of personalities and great dispositions.

Housing

Blue-tongued skinks are not good climbers, and therefore horizontal space is required. A 55-gallon tank is ideal, although larger is always better. Skinks should be housed alone, as they tend to fight each other. The enclosure should have a sturdy mesh top for ventilation.

Skinks do not need elaborate props, but they do like to hide. There should be a hiding place on both ends of the enclosure. Large slabs of rounded cork bark make excellent hiding areas. They also like cylindrical hiding areas, such as PVC pipes. A few rocks, plants, or logs are fine but be careful not to clutter the space. They enjoy moving around more than climbing.

We recommend two materials for the enclosure substrate, including paper and reptile carpeting. These materials are easy to find, clean, safe, and inexpensive. We DO NOT recommend corn cob, wood shavings, reptile bark, sand, and gravel. These materials may be eaten by your skink and cause impaction, which may require surgical removal. These materials also harbor dust, bacteria, and fungi which can irritate your skink's respiratory system.

Regular cleaning of the enclosure is important. Uneaten food needs to be removed daily. Clean and disinfect the enclosure at least once a week with a mild soap solution and disinfectant solution made of 1 capful bleach to 1 gallon of water. Pet stores also sell cleaning solutions appropriate for reptiles. RINSE and dry the enclosure thoroughly before returning your skink to the habitat.



Lighting & Heat

Your skink should have access to UVA/UVB light for 10-12 hours per day, all year long. Skinks that do not get the amount of UV light they need lose bone density and become susceptible to fractures (similar to osteoporosis in humans).

Natural sunlight, when available, is the preferred source of UV light. Window and aquarium glass will filter out most of the beneficial sunlight. During warm weather, you can place the cage or aquarium (with a screen top) by an open window or in a safe place outside for a portion of the day. Your skink should always have access to a shaded area if she chooses. Providing your skink with both warm and cool areas in the enclosure will allow him to effectively regulate his body temperature. This is crucial for all reptiles, as they cannot regulate their own body temperature.

Use an ultraviolet light that emits both UVA and UVB rays year-round. These bulbs will stop emitting the necessary UV rays long before the bulb itself will burn out. You need to change the UV bulbs at least every 6 months. Date your bulbs and change them at least every 6 months even if they are still emitting visible light. Note that fluorescent UV lights do not produce heat and must be used in addition to a heat source. Any lights should be placed where your skink cannot climb or come into contact with them.

It's important to note that there are different species of skink that have slightly different heating needs. Be sure to research the temperature preferences for your skink. Generally speaking, the proper temperature for a skink ranges from 75 degrees Fahrenheit on the cool side to 88 degrees on the warm side. The basking area should range from 90-95 degrees. Place thermometers on both sides of the tank at ground level to monitor the temperature closely.

Diet

Blue-tongued skinks are omnivores that can eat a wide variety of proteins and vegetables. For young skinks, half of their diet should consist of insects. As they mature, their diet will include more vegetables and plant material. Skinks should be fed every other day.

Produce should be fresh, free of pesticides, and fit for human consumption. Chopped leafy greens and mixed vegetables should make up approximately 45-60% of an adult skink's diet. Calcium-rich dark leafy greens such as mustard greens, kale, dandelion, and collard greens should make up the bulk of the vegetable mix. Add in peas, green beans, corn, squash, carrots, sweet potato, cucumber, zucchini, green peppers, and parsley. Adult skinks tend to prefer coarsely chopped vegetables while juveniles prefer finely chopped foods.

Protein should make up at least 50 % of the diet for a young skink. Protein sources include crickets, mealworms, king worms, snails, and pinky mice. Waxworms are higher in fat and

should only be fed as an occasional treat. Rotate their menu so they do not get bored.

The crickets you purchase should be "gut-loaded" with calcium. Most crickets are sold this way, but if your pet store does not "gut-load" their crickets for you, you can purchase an insect food sold for this purpose and follow the directions on the package. The crickets you feed your skink should be no larger than the distance between your skink's eyes. Remove any uneaten crickets after 10 minutes. A calcium carbonate supplement (without phosphorous or Vitamin D) should be given twice a week as well.

Fruit should make up no more than 5-10% of the diet. Try melons, berries, apples, peaches, pears, grapes, and plums as an occasional treat. Chemical-free flowers such as hibiscus, dandelion, and nasturtiums can be given as treats too. Always avoid avocado, eggplant, rhubarb, and high sodium foods.

Your skink should have access to fresh water at all times. The water dish should be shallow and sturdy so it will not tip over. Wash the bowl regularly.

Handling

Any new reptile should be allowed to acclimate to their environment for a few days before handling. Once your skink is eating regularly in the new environment, you can begin handling it.

Initial handling sessions should be limited to 10 minutes or less. This can take place a few times a day during the acclimation process. Be sure to hold your skink close to the floor, or over a bed, sofa, etc. in case they get nervous. Lift your skink by gently encircling its body near the forelegs with your fingers. Use your free hand to support their body. Skinks can be very trusting, but they cannot grip as well as other reptiles. It is important to support them at all times. Remember that skinks cannot regulate their body temperature, so limit their time out of their enclosure. Never grasp your skink by the tail, as it can break off and does not regenerate well.

Preventive Care

We recommend twice-yearly exams for juveniles and once-yearly exams for healthy adults. The signs of poor health in skinks can be subtle and may not be treatable in advanced stages. We recommend a yearly blood test to check your skink's calcium and phosphorus levels to ensure that their dietary needs are being met. This allows us to address any deficiencies before they cause disease. We also recommend a yearly fecal examination (a test run from a stool sample) to check for intestinal parasites, as skinks can harbor intestinal parasites for a long time before they develop any symptoms.