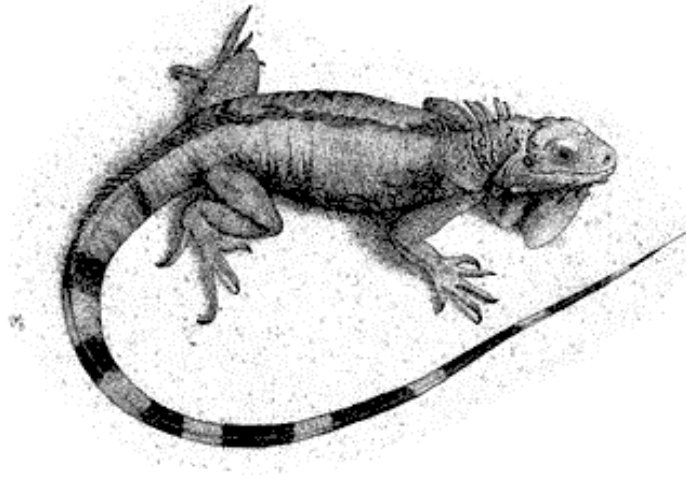


# The Green Iguana

## *Iguana iguana*

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An essentially vegetarian lizard native to Mexico, Central and South America. One of the more commonly kept reptile species. Most individuals come from farming sources rather than from the wild.

**Biology-** Native to New World tropical regions in heavily vegetated habitats. They are basking reptiles that rely on overhead (solar or heat lamp) thermal sources for regulating body temperature. Well developed color vision and good senses of taste and smell.

**Size and Longevity-** Often acquired as young hatchlings ranging from 4-12" in length. Under proper conditions they may grow to three feet long in one year and reach as much as six feet in total length at maturity. Well cared for green iguanas may live for twenty years or more. Young iguanas are bright green, but non-breeding animal colors are usually dull to a grayish green when they reach 3' in length, with some green color retention over the shoulder and ventral area. Some develop various orange shades to their coloration. Adults retain some banding on the tail. They have prominent claws, a dewlap skin fold under their necks and dorsal spines along their neck and back. Some albino specimens occur occasionally.

**Sexual Characteristics-** Both have pores on the inside of the rear legs that are used for scent marking their territories. The pores in the males, which have obvious plugs of dried debris, are more prominent than in females and become larger with age. Young iguanas are difficult to sex, but differences start to become more apparent between 1-2 years age. Maturing males have heavier dewlaps, more prominent temporal swellings and brighter coloration than females.

**Husbandry/Housing-** Require a controlled environment that provides essential resources for their thermoregulation, digestive and behavioral needs. Daytime temperature should average 86-95 degrees F and night temperatures should not drop below 60 degrees. Monitor environmental temperatures with **accurate thermometers** which measure the high and low of the thermal gradient in their enclosure. Humidity can be measured with a hygrometer. Provide a living space proportional to body size. One or two limbs should be available for basking. Provide adequate **ventilation**. Proper light and heat sources are essential and ideally including thermostats and timers. **Cage substrates** should not be materials that can be readily ingested, such as sand and small gravel. Use substrates that are non-toxic and easily cleaned or changed. Cedar should not be used. **Water containers** (bathing and drinking) should not be of the type that can tip over.

Sanitation of branches and other furnishings can be done with a dilute bleach solution to prevent excess contamination in the environment, or they may be heated to 250 ° F for 30 minutes. It is essential that the

**heat and light** conditions are carefully maintained. White lights should not be primary heat sources at night since they disturb sleep and daily light cycles. Heat from above, rather than primarily from below (as with heating pads and “hot rocks”). Take care to prevent iguanas from getting burns by getting too close to a heat lamp. A quality **ultraviolet light source** (such as ReptiSun™ or Vita-lite Plus™) is critical to iguana health because they cannot manufacture **Vitamin D** from their food, and require such light for that process. Lights typically should be replaced when six months old because they become ineffective in producing the essential wavelengths of **UV light** after that time in service. Use red heat lamps for night heat. In warm weather a basking cage placed outdoors can provide exposure to natural sunlight. Be careful that changing sun angles do not overheat this enclosure. Sunlight through a glass window filters out the necessary UV waves that they require. Be cautious with plants with may be toxic if consumed.

**Feeding-** The diet should consist entirely of herbaceous foods: approximately 45% vegetables, 45% leafy greens, 5-15% fruit and 1-10% grains. Variety is the best feeding strategy.

**Dark leafy greens:** **collard greens**, kale, turnip greens, mustard greens, bok choy, dandelion greens and flowers, broccoli leaves (not the stems or flowers), mulberry leaves, romaine, parsley, escarole, nasturtiums, rose and hibiscus blossoms, clover leaves, grasses. Be cautious with greens collected outdoors to assure that they are free of chemical contaminants. Avoid spinach and rhubarb since they contain oxalates, which can contribute to urinary stones and can bind up calcium in the diet.

**Solid vegetables:** bean sprouts, grated squashes and carrots, thawed mixed vegetables (broccoli removed), green beans, cabbages, peas—process to appropriate size according to animal size.

**Fruits:** Chopped apples, bananas, papayas, skinned mangos, berries, kiwi, plums, pears, peaches, tomatoes, melons.

**Misc.:** Tofu can be fed in small quantities as well as unsweetened bran cereals and whole grain breads. Do not feed iceberg lettuce because of its negligible nutrition and its displacement of more nutritious dietary constituents. Many iguana hobbyists avoid feeding all animal matter, but they have been observed eating insects occasionally in the wild. Always provide fresh, clean water and maintain water quality by regular cleaning and replenishment. Proper environmental temperature is essential for digesting nutrients (85 degrees and above). Do not over-supplement with vitamins and minerals. A small pinch of a quality vitamin mineral reptile mix can be placed on food 1-2 times weekly. The best strategy is to focus on proper nutrition, environment and lighting for best nutritional health. Regularly weighing your iguana provides valuable health data.

**Behavior-** Small specimens are easily handled, but mature individuals, especially males, may show **aggression** during the breeding season. As with many lizard species, iguanas may readily fracture and detach their tail while being apprehended, thus should be handled with this caution in mind. Taming is best accomplished with gentle handling of younger animals, but with persistence can be reasonably, but not always, reliably tame as adults. They are **solitary** by nature, and males and females more typically lead separate social lives except for mating activities. The principal methods of people injuries are from bites, toenail scratches and tail whipping. Green iguanas have acute eyesight in daytime but are more easily alarmed in subdued lighting due to their compromised visual acuity. Iguanas periodically shed their skin as a normal process approximately 3-4 times yearly. To aid in this process they should be **misted twice daily**, be provided with a relatively humid environment, and given supervised shallow **warm water soaks** periodically, especially when evidence of shedding is observed.

**Medical Problems:** parasites (external and internal), malnutrition causing bone disease, skin problems, respiratory ailments, injuries, burns, broken tails, retention of ova. All reptiles should be considered to be potential reservoirs of organisms which can be transmitted to people, such as Salmonella. Never clean enclosures in human food preparation areas or bathtubs. Everyone handling or coming into contact with these animals should follow proper sanitation procedures such as hand washing and appropriate disposal and handling of waste, contaminated cage materials and feed dishes. **Common diagnostic procedures** for evaluating ill green iguanas include comprehensive fecal examinations, blood sampling to evaluate blood cells, blood parasites, and blood chemistry values, and x-ray studies.