

Desert Iguana

(*Elaphe guttata*)

Country of Origin	United States of America, Mexico
Average Size	16 Inches
Temperament	Fast, Active, Inquisitive
Food Source	Herbivorous
Experience Level	Beginner



These are a small iguana species, reaching only 16 inches in length, that originates from the hot and desert area of United States of America and Mexico. Not very often offered in captivity, these calm down well and are increasing in popularity, although captive breeding groups have yet to be readily established.

This is an active, diurnal lizard, and as such needs hot temperatures as high as 110F under the basking light, although 90-100 should be adequate. The cool side should be around 80-85F. This high basking spot is vital to the health of this lizard, as they will be unable to correctly digest their food without it.

They take refuge in the tunnels of the kangaroo rat in the wild, and will appreciate several hiding spots. They are also agile climbers. As these species are desert dwellers they do not need any humidity, and as adults, it would be most natural to keep them on a sand base of at least 3 inches in depth. Rocks underneath the basking spot will help retain the heat, and an under tank heat mat will maintain night temperatures. These lizards do hibernate in the winter in the wild, but little is known about the effects of hibernation in captivity.

Desert iguanas are known to have one of the highest metabolisms in the reptile kingdom, and also has one of the highest body temperatures of any vertebrate – their body temperature will range from 100 – 108F in the wild during the summer. Desert iguanas are vegetarians, but will occasionally eat insects if hungry. In the interests of their health it is best to feed a range of vegetables, weeds and flowers in captivity. Because of their high metabolism if maintained at the high temperatures they love, they will use a lot of energy, be very active, and require additional food during the summer months. Provide a small water bowl at all times, although you may never see them drink from it.

UVB lighting is essential for this species, and a vivarium of around 36 – 48 x 24 x 24 inches should house one or two adults successfully.

Overall a relatively new species to the pet trade, that is hardy and well acclimatized to captivity given the correct amount of heat, and a healthy vegetarian diet.

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