

***Clemmys guttata* (Spotted Turtle) Care** - Darrell Senneke and Andy Snider (Curator of Reptiles - [Detroit Zoo](#))
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This care sheet is intended only to cover the general care of this species. Continued research in order to best develop a maintenance plan for whichever species you are caring for is essential.

Shallow wetlands and the woods and fields that surround them in the Eastern United States and Southern Canada, South to Florida are host to this secretive species, *Clemmys guttata*. The diminutive and beautiful Spotted turtle has a smooth, black carapace with a variable number of rounded yellow spots. The plastron is yellow or orange with a variably sized black blotch in each scute. The upper surface of the head, neck, and legs is black, and may have a few scattered yellow spots. The skin under the legs and neck is orange or pinkish. Hatchlings usually have one spot on each scute of their carapace. These spots may multiply as the turtle ages or disappear altogether. Adult Spotted turtles reach a maximum of 5 inches (12 cm) in length.

Breeders are having success with this species and it is now possible to purchase these semi-aquatic turtles from captive born stock. If coming upon a Spotted turtle in the wild do NOT remove it. They are protected in most locations where they are found and are very highly threatened in their natural habitats. This care sheet will deal primarily with hatchling care, as that is the most critical stage of their lives as well as the age that they are most likely to be purchased.

***Clemmys guttata* - Spotted Turtle**

- **Location** - Northeastern United States and Southern Canada - South to Florida - West to Illinois.
- **Habitat** - Shallow Wetlands - Semi Terrestrial
- **Size** - 12 cm (5 inches)
- **Diet** - Carnivorous with minimal plant material
- **Conservation Status** - Endangered in portions of its range
- **Threats** - Habitat loss, collection as pets
- **Alternate Names** - "Polka-dot" turtle

HOUSING SPOTTED TURTLES INDOORS - Hatchling Spotted turtles are almost totally aquatic, leaving the water only to bask. As they age they become progressively more terrestrial but are never found far from water, most food is taken in the water as and as a result of this maintaining water quality is of paramount importance. The most useful form of indoor accommodation for hatchling *Clemmys guttata* consists of a shallow aquarium or plastic sweaterbox. Hatchling Spotted turtles are fairly poor swimmers, I would suggest a water depth of 2 inches (5 cm) or less to allow them to "stand" on the bottom and reach the surface to breathe without difficulty. If this type of arrangement is used an area should be built up in one end of the habitat to provide a dry basking area. In this arrangement, because of the shallowness of the water, filtration is difficult and uneaten food can be missed and rapidly foul the water.

As an alternative to this what I use is an undecorated "slant tank". A sweater box measuring about 24 inches by 16 inches (60 cm by 40 cm) is propped up on one end to provide a slanted bottom, resulting in a water depth at the lowest end of 2 inches (5 cm) and a dry area at the

shallow end. As this is undecorated it is easily cleaned on a frequent basis. The addition of live or plastic water plants add to the sense of security for the animals and in the case of live plants may provide an additional food source. As the animal grows the size of this habitat and depth of water should be increased. At 3 inches (8 cm) or so, Spotted turtles can be moved out of this arrangement and into a semi-terrestrial habitat. At this size the same slanted setup works well on a larger scale. A sheep-watering trough slightly slanted to allow a water depth of 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) and 50% dry land works well for adults indoors. The substrate in the dry portion can be a mixture of long stemmed sphagnum moss and children's play sand.

Water quality is very important. Because of the shallowness of the water in a "slant tank" filtration may not be practical. In this event **frequent** water changes are a must.

Spotted turtles are often seen basking of grassy tussocks or logs in wetlands. To provide a basking site in an artificial setup a hardware store reflector clip light lamp should be positioned over the dry end of the environment. This should be positioned at a height to provide a basking spot of 90 degrees F or so (32 degrees C) in that section of the habitat. The habitat should also be equipped with a full spectrum fluorescent light to provide for UVB. A UVB source is necessary for Vitamin D3 syntheses (needed in calcium metabolism). If preferred to this lighting arrangement an Mercury vapor bulb may be used that fulfills both requirements.

DIET. Wild caught adult Spotted turtles are often problematic feeders but if acquired as hatchlings rapidly take to many offered foods. Be careful not to overfeed them, I recommend only feeding once every day or every other day for the rapidly growing hatchlings. Spotted turtles are very carnivorous and will eagerly consume insects and worms but will also consume some fruits and greens. Any aquatic vegetation such as duckweed will also be appreciated. Many of the commercially prepared turtle diets as well as Koi or Catfish foods that exist on the market today are excellent hatchling Spotted turtle food.

Additional calcium supplementation is essential. It is suggested that one use calcium supplemented with vitamin D3 if the animal is being maintained indoors and calcium without D3 if it is outdoors. Provision of a cuttlefish bone, which can be gnawed if desired, is also recommended.

OUTDOOR HOUSING - Once your turtle is over 3 inches (7.5 cm) in size predator-proof outdoor habitats offer many advantages over indoor accommodations and should seriously be considered as an option. A child's wading pool sunk into the ground in a secure enclosure makes for a serviceable outdoor habitat. Larger ponds with advanced filtration can be used to provide a spectacular outdoor home for your Spotted turtles. Remember to make the pond easy to exit as Spotted turtles are poor swimmers and can drown.

HIBERNATION - This species hibernates in nature. After careful research of methods used to safely do this, hibernation facilities may be provided for the turtle.

Individuals are kept separate during the hibernation period. Weights of all animals are taken pre-hibernation and post-hibernation. Animals are hibernated in a saturated long-fiber sphagnum moss substrate with approx. 1" of water over the top of the sphagnum. They are not fed during the hibernation period. Animals are gradually cooled down from ambient temperatures to approximately 45 degrees F. (7 degrees C) over the course of 1 month. They are kept at this temperature for 1 month. The temperature is then raised over the course of 1 month to ambient temperatures. The whole process takes 3 months. The animals are kept in the dark from the middle 1/3 to middle 1/2 of the hibernation period, only checking on them once/day. The water is

changed in the enclosures 2-3 times during the hibernation period, using water at the same temperature as the animals. After the hibernation period is over, animals are paired up and are fed as per normal.

It should be noted that turtle and tortoise care research is ongoing. As new information becomes available we share this on the World Chelonian Trust web site at www.chelonia.org. Serious keepers find it to be a benefit to have the support of others who keep these species. Care is discussed in our free online email community, which may be joined from the web address above. Please contact us about the many benefits of becoming a member of the World Chelonian Trust.

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