

North American Box Turtles (*Terrapene*)

Compiled from :

[Box Turtle Care and Conservation](#)
[Gulf Coast Turtle and Tortoise Society](#)

Florida Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina bauri*)
Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*)
Gulf Coast Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina major*)
Three-toed Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina triunguis*),
Desert Box Turtle (*Terrapene ornate luteola*)
Ornate Box Turtle (*Terrapene ornata ornata*)

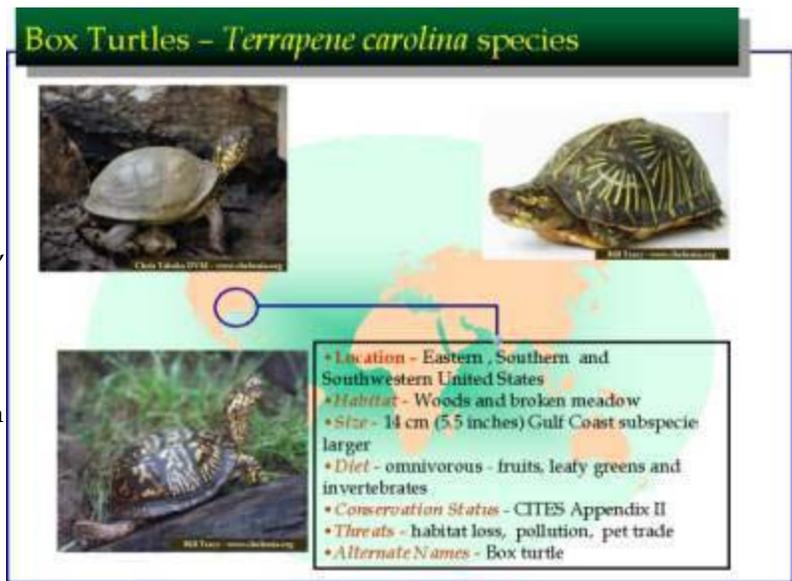


Try to obtain captive-bred box turtles for pets. These will generally be healthier and better adapted to captivity than wild caught turtles. Wild populations are under tremendous pressure from the pet trade- don't add to this pressure. Most states protect their native box turtles so check with state laws before taking one from the wild. If you do acquire a box turtle, remember they are very long-lived animals and require specialized care. They do not make good pets for young children unless there is adult supervision.

Housing - The best habitat for box turtles is a large outdoor enclosure, bounded by siding, wood, bricks or cement blocks at least 18 inches high with an over hanging ledge to prevent climbing out. The pen must provide a variety of environments including sunny and shaded areas and places to hide. Turtles regulate their core body temperature by behavior and need to have a choice between sun and shade. A pile of hay or shrubbery provides ideal hiding/shady place. Being outdoors allows the turtle to supplement what you feed it with snails, slugs, earthworms, etc.

Box turtles are in the same family (*Emydidae*) as water turtles such as sliders, map turtles, and cooters, and as such, although not aquatic, enjoy an occasional swim. A shallow pan, perhaps as deep as the turtle's carapace is high, should be sunk into the ground and kept filled with fresh water, make certain to arrange for easy access and egress of the water dish. Fresh drinking water must be provided daily. During the winter, a well-drained area piled with hay or leaves can be used for hibernation.

Loosen the soil so the turtles can easily bury themselves for protection.



If an outdoor enclosure cannot be provided, a large indoor enclosure can serve as housing for a box turtle. A 'breeder' tank is preferred over standard tropical fish aquariums. Plastic children pools, sandboxes or concrete mixing tubs can make inexpensive habitats. Full spectrum

fluorescent lighting such as a Vita-Light™ is required. A clamp-on 60 – 75 Watt incandescent light fixture with a reflector is necessary to provide a basking area that is warmer than the rest of the container. Ideal basking area temperature is 85 - 88 F. If preferred to this lighting arrangement a Mercury vapor bulb may be used that fulfills both heat and UV requirements. Absorbent flooring material such as clean top soil, leaves, moss or cypress mulch should be provided and changed regularly. Substrates that dry out or get powdery should be avoided. Cedar and pine chips can be poisonous and should not be utilized. A shallow water dish, large enough for the turtle to soak in, is required, as is an area that the turtle can hide in for a sense of security. An overturned, large clay flowerpot can serve as the hide box. Daytime high temperature of 80 F is ideal, nighttime low of 70F is OK. Do not place the turtle's home near air-conditioning vents or drafts.

Feeding - Box turtles can be fed a diet that is 50% mixed fresh vegetables with some fruit, and 50% low fat protein like canned low fat dog food. Ideally the protein should be whole live foods like earthworms, mealworms, beetles, grubs, crickets, slugs and snails. Variety is the key to a healthy appetite and good health. Try apples, peaches, strawberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, bananas, grapes, kale, romaine lettuce (avoid iceberg, it essentially has no nutrition), summer squash, sweet potatoes, soaked alfalfa hay and soaked gerbil pellets. On rare occasions feed corn on the cob, tomatoes, water packed tuna, hard-boiled egg and some lean chopped meats. Prepared turtle foods such as Reptomin or Reptile T.E.N, dried dog food, catfish chow, and trout chow can be used. These should be used sparingly and should be soaked in order to soften them. Turtles should be given a vitamin/mineral supplement to insure proper bone and shell growth. To prevent ingestion of the flooring material all food should be placed on a plate or flat rock or brick paver.

Health - When properly cared for, box turtles are remarkably free of diseases. Some problems require immediate veterinary care. These include swollen lumps on the neck, swollen eyes or nasal discharge, worms in the feces, open wounds or shell damage and mouth rot. Observe your turtle frequently and take care of the small problems before they get become serious problems. With care your box turtle will give you many years of companionship and wonderment. These species hibernate in nature. after careful research into the methods used to safely hibernate box turtles, hibernation facilities may be provided for the turtle. More information can be found on hibernation in Tess Cook's chapter on [Hibernation](#) in her online book at: <http://www.boxturtlesite.org/hib.html> .

Additional information:

It should be noted that turtle and tortoise care research is ongoing. As new information becomes available we share this on our web sites. Please check back often to see this updated information at Tess Cook's Box Turtle Care and Conservation web site at www.boxturtlesite.org/ and 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 communities, which may be joined from the web addresses above.

www.chelonia.org - World Chelonian Trust

World Chelonian Trust
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