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Desert Tortoise Care

Cold Weather Care

- Healthy tortoises should be kept outside year round. (If they are ill, they should not hibernate)
- Bring your tortoise to see the vet every September for a pre-hibernation exam and to get feces checked for parasites.
- When the weather becomes cooler in the fall, the tortoise will prepare for hibernation. To help with this process, you can construct a den. (See *Den Construction* handout)
- If you cannot construct a den, you may place the tortoise into a garage or storeroom. However, this is not ideal since it may be difficult to maintain cool enough temperatures.
- The temperature for ideal hibernation conditions should remain between 40-55° F, and humidity between 30-45%. If the hibernation area is too warm, the tortoise cannot hibernate properly.
- Keep your tortoise in a dark, draft-free area. Check on it every 1-2 weeks, but do not move it.
- If the animal is being kept indoors for hibernation, it is possible for it to become dehydrated. Offer water every 4-6 weeks, or every 2-3 weeks for juveniles.
- If your tortoise chooses to not hibernate, it may be sick. If this is the case, bring your tortoise in for an exam.

Warm Weather Care

- When the tortoise emerges from hibernation, keep shallow pools of drinking water available. Be aware that desert tortoises cannot swim and will drown. If you have a pool or pond, make sure it is blocked off so that the tortoise cannot reach it.
- The shallow pools of water are for drinking and soaking. The tortoise can absorb water from their cloaca (located in the tail) while sitting in the water.
- During the extremely hot summer months, your tortoise will go underground and/or become less active. Make sure that food, water, and shade are always available.
- If you don't want your animal to roam free in the backyard, you can create an enclosure. The enclosure must be a minimum of 120 ft². This size enclosure can house either a single male or 3 females. Females and males should be separated from each other to avoid breeding.
- The enclosure walls should be at least 18 inches high to prevent escape since tortoises are good climbers. Walls should be built from concrete blocks.

If you have any questions about Desert Tortoises, please contact the Sonora Desert Museum at (520) 883-3062 or visit their website at www.desertmuseum.org. You may also ask a staff member at Scottsdale Veterinary Clinic.

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