

## Desert Tortoise Nutrition and Den Construction

### Nutrition

#### **1. Native plants to feed your tortoise:**

Native grasses  
Plantain  
Cassia  
Globe mallow  
Other mallows  
Buckwheat  
Curly mesquite  
Spurge  
Deer grass  
Evening primroses  
Rock hibiscus  
Arizona cotton top  
Morning glory  
Honeysuckle  
Prickly pear

#### **2. Plants to grow for your tortoise:**

Bermuda grass  
Nasturtium  
Alfalfa  
Sweet Peas  
Clover  
Petunias  
Dichondra

#### **3. Other foods to give your tortoise:**

Grape leaves  
Rose petals  
Hibiscus  
Rabbit pellets  
Mulberry leaves  
Hay (alfalfa, bermuda & timothy)  
Beet greens  
Radicchio  
Cilantro  
Bok choy  
Snow peas  
Various greens (mustard, collard, kale, turnip, endive, dandelion, red or green leaf lettuces)

Parsley

Endive

4. Never feed iceberg lettuce to your tortoise!

5. As long as you are feeding a wide variety of healthy foods, no additional vitamins or mineral supplements (such as calcium) are needed, as too much can be harmful to your tortoise.

6. It is very important to leave your tortoise outside so it receives the natural sun exposure needed to maintain a healthy calcium metabolism.

## **Den Construction**

1. Use a large plastic barrel or a metal trashcan, cut it in half, and place it into desired spot for the den.
  - a. The winter den should face south. The summer den should face east, north, or northeast.
2. Place 8-12 inches of soil onto the barrel for insulation.
3. You can also build a den using concrete blocks or plywood, still using soil to insulate.
4. In order to camouflage the den in your yard, decorate with native, edible plants on top of and around the den.
  - a. See above list for native plants
  - b. Plant cacti on top (tortoises will leave them alone)
  - c. Avoid planting Oleander as it is toxic.
5. If you have any questions or concerns about constructing a den, feel free to ask a staff member at Scottsdale Veterinary Clinic. We are more than happy to help.