



TERRAPINS

In recent years terrapins have become more and more popular. This is mainly due to young children buying them without realising what is involved in looking after them.

Originating from countries such as America, Mexico, South Argentina and the West Indies, terrapins have become a common pet in the West. The main species exported by these countries are the red eared terrapin, yellow bellied terrapin, big bend terrapin and the ornate terrapin. These are the breeds that are bred for the pet industry and are easily identified. In the wild terrapins will mate with any other species of terrapin thus creating many subspecies.

Found mainly in ponds with heavy vegetation, muddy streams and small woodland lakes, they spend most of their time in water or basking in the sun. The male terrapin grows bigger than the female and is less coloured. The sex is determined by the length and thickness of their tails. Males also have much longer claws than the females.

At birth they are no bigger than 1 to 1 and a half inches, but soon grow up to 11-12 inches if well looked after.

Being dedicated swimmers terrapins require large water masses. Glass aquariums work well and can be easily cleaned. A good filtration system is also needed to help keep waste down, although the tank will need to be regularly cleaned. This is vital for the health of your terrapin.

Depending on how many you have and their size will depend on how much room they will need. An adult terrapin, bigger than 6 inches will need a

water volume of 55 gallons, including an area in which it can bask. This area must be dry and in direct sunlight of full spectrum lighting.

It is important to make sure that your tank is going to be suitable for your pet. There are a few things to consider before buying a terrapin; whether you have the right kind of filtration, right lighting and the right heating equipment and that you know how to clean your tank properly.

Filters come in all shapes and sizes. The three most popular are the under-gravel filter, box filter and the rim filter. They are all easy to install and fairly inexpensive. The job of the filter is to pick up most of the waste your terrapin makes, which is generally quite a lot! However, most of their mess will have to be cleaned by yourself.

Correct lighting is vital to the health of your terrapin and without it within 8 months they will die. Like a lot of reptiles and amphibians they need full spectrum lighting to replace natural sunlight. This provides vital Vitamin D which is essential for a healthy shell and bones. Terrapins also require

regularity of daylight and nightlight. As winter draws in less light is required so that they can go into hibernation.

They must be kept warm at all times, particularly in the more active months (summer time). A constant average temperature of 75°F in the water, but the air can be slightly cooler.