

Easy Reference Sheet

Caring for Turtles

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Queensland is home to 14 species of freshwater turtles, 4 of which are found in the South-east Queensland region. Freshwater turtles require very specialised housing requirements and for this reason, larger individuals usually undergo rehabilitation in wildlife facilities/hospitals.

Do I need a Permit to care for turtles?

Yes. You will need a REHABILITATION PERMIT to care for turtles. A Rehabilitation Permit can be obtained from a licensed wildlife care group such as Wildcare.

Remember all Australian native wildlife is protected in Queensland. You cannot keep them without an appropriate Permit.

Do I have to do any training to care for turtles?

Yes. Turtles have specialised dietary and housing needs. You must have a good understanding of their biology, be able to recognise signs of illness and be able to provide emergency care to them.

In Wildcare, you will need to complete the following training workshops in order to care for turtles:

- Orientation – compulsory for all members
- Rescue and First Aid for Wildlife (Basic) – compulsory for all members
- Freshwater Turtles (Basic)

Is caring for turtles difficult?

In order to care for freshwater turtles, you need to have very specific housing to prevent management issues. They can often be difficult to feed in captivity. Like all of our native wildlife, they do have specialised requirements.

Remember:

- Turtles have **specific heating and lighting requirements** – you need to be able to provide this.
- They are **quiet** – they are suitable for people in high-density residential areas where noise needs to be kept to a minimum.
- They should not be housed near domestic pets.
- Turtles require **feeding once a day** in warmer weather.
- Turtles are generally in care as a result of shell fractures – these are very **slow to heal** and they may need to be in care for up to 12 months.

If you have captive/pet reptiles, you need to ensure that they are kept separate from any wild reptiles in order to eliminate the spread of disease to wild populations and also to protect your own pets.

Remember, we raise to RELEASE!

We must care for wildlife in a way that ensures their survival once returned to the wild.

What equipment do I need to care for turtles?

Turtles need to be housed and cared for during rehabilitation to prevent further injury, prevent escape, minimise stress and to allow them to display their natural behaviour.

A few things we must consider when housing turtles include:

- Providing an appropriate heat source and access to UVB light is paramount in the successful rehabilitation of all reptile species.
- Most commercially available large fish tanks are able to be adapted for smaller species of freshwater turtles.
- Water must be able to be warmed with an appropriate aquarium heater.
- During some periods of rehabilitation, freshwater turtles will require specialised housing to allow them to be 'dry docked' which enables any wounds to be kept clean and dry.
- Most common species of freshwater turtles will eat commercially bred insects along with vegetables.
- During the final stages of rehabilitation, most turtles will require access to an outdoor enclosure and heated pond to enable them to re-develop their muscle tone. Some wildlife volunteers specialise in this final stage of rehabilitation.

Below is a brief overview of some of the equipment that turtles require. The Wildcare reptile training workshop and manual covers their requirements in more detail.

Rescue Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality deep plastic storage tub with a secure clip-on lid in a variety of sizes. • Clean, second-hand towels to line transport carrier. • Quantity of clean pillowcases for transporting.
Adult Turtles <i>Critical Care Stage</i> <i>Intermediate Care Stage</i> <i>Pre-Release and Final Rehabilitation Stage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large tank with UVB light and appropriate heat source • Size of enclosures will depend on the species and size of turtle but will range from 0.6m L x 0.4m W x 0.4m H to 1.0m L x .5m W x .4m H. Fifty percent of the enclosure should be pond. • As above • Size of enclosures will depend on the species and size of turtle but will range from 1.8m L x 0.6m W x 0.4m H to 2.0m L x 1.2m W x 0.9m H. Fifty percent of the enclosure should be pond. • Fittings will depend upon the species and are outlined in the Wildcare reptile training course and manual • As above

Critical Care Stage – designed to reduce an animal's level of physical activity for a short period of time and to provide easy access for monitoring, treatment and feeding.

Intermediate Care Stage – allows sufficient space for some physical activity while enabling the animal to be readily caught for monitoring and treatment.

Pre-Release/Final Rehabilitation Stage – allows an animal to regain better physical condition, display natural behaviour, acclimatise to normal weather conditions and reduce human contact.

The measurements for enclosures listed above are sourced from the *Code of Practice – Care of Sick, Injured and Orphaned Protected Animals in Queensland* (EHP). In some circumstances, Wildcare's housing requirements exceed the CoP suggestions.