**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Blue-Tongued Skink Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Blue-tongued skinks (*Tiliqua* spp.) are **large, ground-dwelling lizards** native to Australia, New Guinea, and parts of Indonesia. They’re named for their distinctive **bright blue tongue**, which they display when threatened.

The **Northern blue-tongued skink (*Tiliqua scincoides intermedia*)** is the most common pet species in the U.S. These lizards are known for their calm temperament, sturdy build, and curious personalities, making them excellent reptile companions for those prepared to meet their care needs.

Adults typically reach **18–24 inches** long and can live **15–20+ years** in captivity.

## **Housing & Environment**

Blue-tongued skinks are **terrestrial** and require an enclosure with plenty of floor space for exploring, burrowing, and thermoregulating. A single adult needs at least a **4×2×2 ft enclosure** (approx. 75–120 gallons). Larger is always better to provide exercise and enrichment.

Inside the enclosure, offer **secure hides**, logs, and textured surfaces to create interest and security. Substrate should allow some burrowing while maintaining appropriate humidity.

**Recommended substrate options:**

* Aspen shavings (for drier setups)
* Coconut husk or cypress mulch (for higher humidity)
* Reptile-safe soil blends
* Paper-based bedding for simpler cleaning

Avoid cedar or pine shavings, which release aromatic oils that can harm reptiles.

**Cleaning guidelines:**

* Spot-clean waste daily
* Replace substrate fully every 4–6 weeks or as needed
* Disinfect enclosure surfaces with reptile-safe products regularly

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Blue-tongued skinks need a **warm basking area** and a cooler retreat to regulate body temperature.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Basking zone:** 95–100°F surface temperature
* **Cool side:** 75–82°F
* **Nighttime:** Can drop to ~70–75°F

Overhead halogen or incandescent bulbs are recommended for basking heat. Use thermostats or dimmers to prevent overheating. Avoid heat rocks, which can cause burns.

**UVB lighting:**

* While skinks can survive without UVB, **low to moderate UVB (5–10%) is recommended** to support healthy metabolism and vitamin D3 production.
* Use a high-quality linear T5 UVB tube spanning at least half the enclosure.
* Provide **12–14 hours of daylight** per day.

**Humidity:**

* Maintain **35–50%** for most Australian species (Northern, Eastern blue-tongued skinks).
* Indonesian species need higher humidity (**60–80%**).
* Mist lightly as needed and provide a moist hide to help with shedding.

A combination of accurate thermometers and hygrometers ensures proper environmental monitoring.

## **Water & Hydration**

Fresh water should be provided **at all times** in a sturdy, tip-resistant bowl.

* Replace water daily to prevent bacterial growth.
* Clean the dish regularly with reptile-safe disinfectant.
* Some skinks may soak occasionally, which is normal.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Blue-tongued skinks are **omnivores** with varied dietary needs. A healthy diet includes a combination of high-quality protein, vegetables, and occasional fruit.

**Staple diet components:**

* Approximately **50% vegetables** (dark leafy greens, squash, carrots, bell peppers)
* **40% protein** (lean cooked ground turkey, canned dog food without artificial additives, low-fat cat food, boiled egg, insects like dubia roaches or superworms)
* **10% fruit** (berries, melon, mango—offered sparingly)

Commercial prepared diets designed for omnivorous reptiles can be incorporated but should not be the sole food source.

**Supplementation:**

* Dust food with **calcium with D3 powder 2–3× per week**
* Offer a **multivitamin 1× weekly**

**Feeding frequency:**

* Juveniles: Feed **daily**
* Adults: Feed **every 2–3 days**

Remove uneaten food promptly to maintain enclosure hygiene.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Blue-tongued skinks are known for being **calm and relatively easy to handle** compared to many lizards.

**Handling tips:**

* Always support the entire body, including the broad tail.
* Avoid grabbing from above—approach gently from the side.
* Keep handling sessions short and frequent to build trust.
* Never restrain by the tail, though blue-tongued skinks are less prone to dropping their tail than some lizards.

With time, many skinks become quite tolerant and will calmly explore hands or laps.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** soon after bringing your skink home, followed by **annual wellness checkups**.

**Common health issues:**

* Metabolic bone disease (from insufficient UVB or calcium)
* Respiratory infections (often due to improper temperature or humidity)
* Parasites (internal or external)
* Obesity (from overfeeding or lack of exercise)
* Shedding difficulties (dysecdysis)

**Signs of illness:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Swelling in limbs or jaw
* Difficulty breathing or wheezing
* Loss of appetite or weight loss
* Retained shed, especially around toes

Prompt veterinary care improves outcomes and helps prevent progression.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Blue-tongued skinks are curious and benefit from a **dynamic environment**.

**Enrichment strategies include:**

* Rotating logs and hides periodically to create novelty
* Providing textured surfaces for climbing and exploration
* Offering occasional supervised out-of-enclosure time in a secure space
* Using feeding puzzles or scattered food to encourage natural foraging behavior

Creating an enriched enclosure supports mental health and helps prevent boredom.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* The **bright blue tongue** startles predators and is used in displays.
* Skinks are part of the **largest lizard family (Scincidae)**.
* Unlike many lizards, they have **broad, flat bodies and reduced necks**.
* They can live **15–20+ years** with proper husbandry.
* While calm, they still need **ample space, proper heating, and a varied diet** to thrive.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Large, escape-proof enclosure (4×2×2 ft minimum)
* Halogen or incandescent basking bulb with thermostat/dimmer
* T5 HO UVB bulb with appropriate fixture
* Digital thermometers and hygrometer
* Secure hides and climbing décor
* Moist hide for shedding support
* Safe substrate appropriate to species humidity needs
* High-quality protein and fresh vegetables
* Calcium with D3 and multivitamin powders
* Shallow, stable water dish
* Feeding tongs and cleaning tools
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*