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Greek Tortoise Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Greek tortoises (*Testudo graeca*) are small to medium-sized Mediterranean tortoises known for their domed shells and gentle, hardy disposition. These tortoises are long-lived, often reaching 40–60 years or more in captivity. While resilient with proper care, they are highly sensitive to incorrect humidity, temperature, or diet, particularly during early life stages. Greek tortoises are largely terrestrial, browsing on low vegetation and requiring both space and structure to stay healthy and active.

## **Housing & Environment**

Greek tortoises thrive in outdoor enclosures during warm seasons, with secure fencing and predator protection. Indoors, they require a large tortoise table or open enclosure—not a glass tank—to reduce stress and ensure proper airflow.

**Indoor Enclosure Tips:**

* Minimum 4x2 ft for one adult (larger is better)
* Open-topped tortoise tables with high walls (12–18 inches)
* Substrate: organic topsoil, coconut coir, or a sand/soil mix for burrowing
* Hides and visual barriers for security
* Avoid: glass tanks, cedar/pine bedding, and steep ramps

**Outdoor Setup (when weather permits):**

* Secure perimeter with buried fencing to prevent digging out
* Natural sun exposure for UVB
* Shelter for cool, shaded resting
* Safe edible plants and rocks to encourage foraging and exploration

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

As ectothermic reptiles, Greek tortoises rely on external heat sources for proper metabolism and digestion. Indoors, they require both a basking heat source and UVB lighting.

**Temperature Gradient:**

* Basking spot: 90–95°F
* Cool side: 75–80°F
* Nighttime: 65–70°F

**Heating & Lighting:**

* Use a basking bulb or ceramic heat emitter (safely mounted above)
* Provide UVB lighting (T5 10.0 or 12% strength) 10–12 hours/day
* Replace UVB bulbs every 6–12 months depending on type
* Avoid under-tank heaters (risk of overheating or burns)

**Humidity:**

* Ideal humidity: 40–60%
* Offer a humid hide for juveniles to help prevent pyramiding
* Mist substrate as needed to maintain levels
* Provide good ventilation to prevent mold

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Greek tortoises are herbivores and thrive on a natural, high-fiber, low-protein diet. Their digestive system is adapted to dry, coarse plants, not fruits or rich vegetables.

**Daily Diet:**

* Grasses and hay (timothy, orchard)
* Dark leafy greens (dandelion, collards, mustard greens, turnip greens)
* Edible weeds (plantain, clover, chickweed)
* Occasional flowers (hibiscus, nasturtium)

**Avoid:**

* Fruits, animal protein, iceberg lettuce, and high-oxalate greens (spinach, beet greens)
* Cat/dog food or other rich commercial diets

**Supplementation:**

* Calcium carbonate powder: 2–3x/week
* Multivitamin with D3: once weekly if limited UVB access
* Provide a cuttlebone for self-regulated calcium intake

**Water:**

* Fresh, shallow water dish available at all times
* Soak tortoises 1–2x per week for 15–20 minutes to encourage hydration

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Routine wellness exams with a reptile-savvy veterinarian are essential. Greek tortoises are hardy but can mask illness until advanced stages.

**Common Health Concerns:**

* Respiratory infections from improper humidity or temps
* Pyramiding shell growth in juveniles (linked to poor humidity/diet)
* Metabolic bone disease (MBD) from calcium or UVB deficiency
* Parasites—especially in wild-caught or outdoor-kept tortoises
* Beak or nail overgrowth

**Signs to Watch For:**

* Reduced appetite or activity
* Nasal discharge or wheezing
* Swollen eyes, soft shell in juveniles
* Irregular feces, straining, or prolapse

## **Behavior & Handling**

Greek tortoises are generally calm and can become quite interactive with their caregivers. They enjoy foraging, exploring their space, and digging.

**Handling Tips:**

* Always support the full shell (plastron and carapace)
* Avoid frequent handling to reduce stress
* Wash hands after handling to prevent zoonotic disease transfer

## **Enrichment**

Enrichment promotes natural behaviors and helps prevent stress and boredom. These tortoises benefit from changes to their habitat and opportunities to explore.

**Enrichment Ideas:**

* Naturalistic terrain (rocks, logs, edible plants)
* Digging areas with varied substrate depths
* Occasional rearrangement of enclosure layout
* Outdoor supervised time (weather permitting)

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Greek tortoises can live 50+ years—long-term planning is essential
* They are diurnal and most active in morning and late afternoon
* Males tend to have longer tails and a concave plastron
* They often recognize their keepers and will approach for food
* Outdoor enclosures should be escape- and predator-proof

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Large, open-topped enclosure (4x2 ft minimum)
* Basking bulb and ceramic heat emitter
* T5 UVB fixture and bulb
* Digital thermometer and hygrometer
* Soil-based or mixed substrate (avoid cedar/pine)
* Shallow water dish
* Daily dark leafy greens and grasses
* Calcium supplement and cuttlebone
* Hides and natural décor for enrichment
* Reptile-safe disinfectant for cleaning
* Secure transport carrier for vet visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*