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Iguana Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

The **green iguana (*Iguana iguana*)** is a large, arboreal, diurnal lizard native to Central and South America’s tropical forests. Known for their striking green coloration as juveniles (which may fade to browns or oranges with age), long muscular tails, and prominent dewlaps, iguanas can grow over **5–6 feet** in length.

Despite their popularity, iguanas are **complex, high-maintenance reptiles** that require large, secure enclosures, specific diets, and dedicated care. They often live **10–20 years** in captivity with proper husbandry.

Iguanas can be defensive, territorial, and strong—even tame individuals may scratch or whip with their tails if stressed. They are best suited for **experienced reptile keepers** prepared for their significant space and care needs.

## **Housing & Environment**

Green iguanas are **arboreal lizards** that need **very large, tall enclosures** to climb and bask properly.

**Minimum recommended enclosure size for adults:**

* **At least 8 feet long × 4 feet wide × 6–8 feet tall**
* Larger is always better, and many owners convert entire rooms or build custom enclosures

**Key enclosure features:**

* Vertical climbing branches and shelves
* Multiple secure hides and shaded areas
* Strong perches capable of supporting their weight
* Large doors for safe access
* Secure, escape-proof design with good ventilation

**Substrate:**

* Easy-to-clean materials like sealed flooring, reptile carpet, or newspaper
* Avoid loose substrates that can cause impaction or harbor bacteria

**Cleaning:**

* Spot-clean daily
* Disinfect perches, walls, and floors regularly
* Replace or wash décor monthly or as needed

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Iguanas are **diurnal baskers** needing **strong heat gradients, UVB exposure, and moderate humidity**.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Basking area:** 95–105°F
* **Ambient daytime:** 80–90°F
* **Cooler areas:** 75–80°F
* **Nighttime:** 70–75°F

**Heating:**

* Overhead basking lamps (halogen or incandescent), controlled by dimmers or thermostats
* Ceramic heat emitters for nighttime warmth if needed
* Avoid heat rocks, which pose burn risks

**UVB Lighting:**

* Essential to prevent metabolic bone disease
* High-output **T5 HO 10–14% UVB tubes** recommended
* Provide 12–14 hours of daylight with UVB coverage across 50–75% of enclosure
* Replace bulbs every 6–12 months

**Humidity:**

* Maintain **60–80%** average
* Achieve with daily misting, large water basins, live plants, and optional humidifiers or foggers
* Digital hygrometers recommended for accuracy

Iguanas naturally regulate their temperature and humidity by moving between basking, shaded, and humid microclimates in their enclosure.

## **Water & Hydration**

Fresh, clean water should always be available in a **large, tip-resistant bowl**.

**Hydration practices:**

* Iguanas often soak in water dishes, so ensure they are large enough for partial soaking
* Mist the enclosure 1–2 times daily to maintain humidity and encourage drinking
* Many iguanas drink water droplets from leaves and enclosure surfaces
* Clean water bowls daily to prevent bacterial growth

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Green iguanas are **strict herbivores** requiring a **high-fiber, low-protein plant-based diet**. Feeding inappropriate foods (animal proteins, high-oxalate greens, or fruits in excess) can cause serious health issues.

**Staple diet (≈85%):**

* Dark leafy greens: collard, mustard, turnip, dandelion greens, escarole, endive
* Other veggies: squash, bell peppers, green beans

**Supplemental items (≈10–15%):**

* Edible flowers (hibiscus, nasturtium)
* Limited fruits (berries, melon, mango)—use as rare treats

**Avoid:**

* Animal proteins (meat, insects, eggs)
* High-oxalate greens in excess (spinach, beet greens, Swiss chard)
* Citrus fruits

**Feeding schedule:**

* Offer fresh greens **daily**
* Remove uneaten food after several hours to maintain hygiene

**Supplements:**

* Calcium with D3: **2–3× weekly** (especially for juveniles or indoor-only setups)
* Multivitamin: **1× weekly** (formulated for reptiles)

## **Behavior & Handling**

Iguanas are intelligent and recognize familiar caretakers, but they can be **territorial and defensive**.

**Handling tips:**

* Always support the entire body and tail
* Approach calmly from the side to avoid startling
* Begin with short, gentle sessions to build trust
* Use protective clothing if needed—scratches and tail whips can be strong
* Avoid grabbing or restraining the dewlap or tail

Socialization from a young age is key, but **never force handling** if the animal is stressed or defensive.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** soon after acquisition and **annual checkups** with a reptile-experienced veterinarian.

**Common health issues include:**

* Metabolic bone disease (from inadequate UVB or calcium)
* Respiratory infections (from incorrect temperatures or humidity)
* Mouth rot (infectious stomatitis)
* Parasites (internal and external)
* Kidney disease (often from chronic dehydration or poor diet)
* Obesity from overfeeding or inappropriate foods

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Loss of appetite or weight loss
* Difficulty breathing or wheezing
* Swollen jaw or limbs
* Discharge from mouth or nose
* Abnormal shedding or retained skin

Early veterinary care helps prevent disease progression and improves outcomes.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

A well-designed enclosure supports **natural behaviors and mental health**.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Sturdy, climbable branches and shelves at varying heights
* Dense foliage (live or artificial) for hiding and shade
* Large basking ledges with secure footing
* Water basins for soaking and humidity
* Rotating décor and climbing options to stimulate exploration
* Natural light cycles with timers to mimic day/night rhythms

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Green iguanas can **grow over 5–6 feet** in length, including their long tails.
* Their **dewlap** (throat fan) helps regulate heat and communicate with other iguanas.
* Iguanas are **strict herbivores**—animal protein causes kidney damage over time.
* Native to **tropical forests** where they bask in the canopy and escape predators by diving into water.
* With excellent care, they can live **10–20+ years** in captivity.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Large, tall enclosure (≥8×4×6 ft recommended)
* Strong, climbable branches and perches
* Secure hides and shaded areas
* High-output T5 HO UVB lighting
* Overhead basking lamps with thermostat/dimmer
* Digital thermometers and hygrometers
* Daily fresh dark leafy greens and chopped veggies
* Calcium with and without D3, reptile multivitamin
* Large, stable water basin for drinking and soaking
* Misting system or spray bottle
* Feeding tongs and cleaning supplies
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*