**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Map Turtle Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Map turtles (*Graptemys* spp.) are medium-sized, semi-aquatic freshwater turtles native to rivers and streams in North America. Named for the fine, map-like lines on their shells, they’re prized for their striking appearance and active swimming behavior.

Adult females can grow **7–10 inches** (some species larger), while males are smaller, typically **3–6 inches**. Lifespans in captivity can exceed **30–40 years** with proper care. While hardy and alert, they require **large, clean aquatic setups** with basking areas and good water quality.

## **Housing & Environment**

Map turtles are **fully aquatic** but need easy access to a **completely dry basking platform**. They are strong swimmers and appreciate deep water with room to move.

A single adult female needs **at least 75–100 gallons** of water; males may be kept in **40–50 gallons**, but more space is always better. Water depth should be **12–18+ inches**, with varied levels and resting spots. Provide strong filtration to manage high waste levels, and arrange driftwood, rocks, or floating logs for naturalistic perching and hiding.

**Habitat Highlights:**

* **Tank size:** ≥75 gallons for adult female; 40–50 gallons for adult male
* **Water depth:** ≥12–18 inches, sloped or stepped areas
* **Basking platform:** Fully dry, stable, accessible
* **Substrate:** Bare-bottom or fine sand; avoid small gravel
* **Décor:** Driftwood, large rocks, secured aquatic plants
* **Filtration:** High-capacity external/canister filter (rated ≥2× tank volume)
* **Maintenance:** Spot-clean daily; partial water changes weekly

## **Temperature, Lighting & UVB**

Map turtles are **cold-blooded reptiles** requiring both aquatic and basking heat zones. Water temperature should be maintained at **74–78°F** (juveniles slightly warmer). The basking area should reach **85–95°F**.

Provide **12 hours of UVB lighting daily** over the basking platform. UVB is critical for calcium metabolism and preventing metabolic bone disease. Replace bulbs every 6–12 months even if they still light up.

**Temperature & Lighting Tips:**

* **Water temp:** 74–78°F (up to 80°F for hatchlings/juveniles)
* **Basking spot:** 85–95°F
* **UVB lighting:** 10–12%, 12 hrs/day
* **Heating equipment:** Submersible aquarium heater, overhead basking lamp
* **Night temps:** Can safely drop to low 70s°F

## **Water Quality & Maintenance**

Clean water is **essential** for map turtle health. They produce significant waste, so use a **strong, oversized filter** rated for at least double the tank volume.

Perform **weekly partial water changes (25–50%)** with dechlorinated water. Remove uneaten food daily to avoid fouling. Regularly test for ammonia, nitrites, and nitrates to maintain safe water parameters.

**Water Care Guidelines:**

* **Filtration:** High-capacity canister or external filter
* **Water changes:** 25–50% weekly
* **Water source:** Dechlorinated or conditioned tap water
* **Daily:** Remove food debris, monitor clarity
* **Testing:** Monthly water parameter checks

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Map turtles are **omnivorous** with a strong preference for animal matter, especially as juveniles and females (who have broader heads for crushing snails and crustaceans). A balanced diet includes commercial aquatic turtle pellets, insects, worms, crustaceans, occasional fish, and dark leafy greens.

Feed juveniles daily and adults every **2–3 days**. Use a separate feeding container if possible to reduce tank mess. Offer calcium supplementation **2–3× weekly** and a reptile multivitamin once weekly.

**Diet Guidelines:**

* **Staple:** High-quality aquatic turtle pellets
* **Protein sources:** Earthworms, crickets, shrimp, snails, low-fat fish
* **Vegetables:** Romaine, collard, dandelion greens, duckweed
* **Fruits:** Very rare—minimal treats
* **Supplements:** Calcium with D3 (2–3×/week), reptile multivitamin (1×/week)
* **Feeding method:** Consider separate feeding tub

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Map turtles benefit from an **initial veterinary exam** and **annual checkups**. Common health issues include **respiratory infections** (often from improper temps or humidity), **shell rot** (due to poor basking or water quality), **parasites**, and **metabolic bone disease** (from lack of UVB or calcium).

Monitor for signs such as wheezing, nasal discharge, buoyancy problems, soft shell, loss of appetite, or lethargy. Practice good hygiene and **always wash hands** after contact to reduce the risk of **Salmonella** transmission.

**Healthcare Reminders:**

* **Annual vet exams:** Physical, fecal, possible bloodwork
* **Common issues:** Respiratory infections, shell rot, parasites, MBD
* **Warning signs:** Nasal discharge, wheezing, buoyancy changes, shell softening
* **Hygiene:** Wash hands before/after handling

## **Behavior & Handling**

Map turtles are **active, strong swimmers** that enjoy exploring their tank. They can be shy, often diving when startled, but may become accustomed to feeding times and observe their keepers with curiosity.

Limit handling to reduce stress. When necessary, **support the entire body** from underneath. Avoid lifting by limbs or tail.

**Behavior Tips:**

* **Temperament:** Active, alert, cautious
* **Handling:** Minimal, gentle support from below
* **Signs of stress:** Hiding, rapid diving, defensive postures
* **Interaction:** Best observed in enriched, well-designed enclosure

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Provide a **complex, engaging environment** that mimics their river habitat. Include driftwood, submerged logs, large rocks, and secure aquatic plants to create hiding and resting places. Floating basking docks allow natural behaviors.

Rotate décor periodically to encourage exploration and reduce boredom.

**Enrichment Ideas:**

* Floating docks and sturdy basking platforms
* Driftwood and submerged logs
* Large smooth rocks for perching
* Live or artificial aquatic plants
* Varied water depths and resting shelves

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* Named for **fine, map-like lines** on their shells.
* Native to **North American rivers** with strong currents and sandy bottoms.
* Females grow **much larger** than males.
* Long-lived pets—**30–40+ years** is common.
* Require **strong filtration and clean water** for health.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Large aquarium (≥75–100 gallons recommended)
* High-capacity canister or external filter
* Submersible heater, basking lamp with UVB bulb
* Thermometer for water and basking zones
* Stable, dry basking platform
* Driftwood, rocks, aquatic plants
* High-quality turtle pellets, live/frozen protein items
* Fresh greens, calcium-rich veggies
* Calcium with D3 and reptile multivitamin
* Water conditioner, test kit
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center 2025*