**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Musk Turtle Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Commonly known as musk turtles or "stinkpots," these compact aquatic turtles (*Kinosternidae* family) typically reach 3–5 inches in length, though larger species like the loggerhead musk turtle may grow up to 6 inches. Although primarily aquatic, they may bask or forage on land occasionally. Musk turtles can live for 30–50 years. They are largely nocturnal and prefer a calm routine. When stressed, they can emit a distinctive musky odor as a defense, and may nip if startled.

## **Housing & Environment**

Musk turtles thrive in fully aquatic setups with room to swim and occasional basking access. Ideally housed in aquariums of at least 30 gallons for a single adult, water depth should be roughly equal to shell length, allowing them to right themselves easily. A shallow basking platform or floating dock is essential even though they seldom bask.

* Tank size: ≥30 gallons (40–60 gal recommended for adult pair)
* Water depth: approximately equal to shell width
* Basking platform: essential, even if used rarely
* Substrate: bare bottom or fine sand; avoid gravel that can cause impaction
* Enclosure hygiene: spot-clean daily, perform partial water changes weekly, change full water monthly

## **Temperature & Lighting**

Maintaining proper thermal gradients is critical. Water temperature should range from 75–80 °F, rising to 80–85 °F for juveniles, and ambient air above water should be warmed to mid‑80s °F in the basking zone. Use a ceramic heat emitter or basking bulb for warmth. A UVB light (5.0) over the basking area, on a 12‑hour cycle, supports calcium metabolism and prevents metabolic bone disease.

* Water: maintain 75–80 °F (80–85 °F for juveniles)
* Basking area: around 90 °F; ambient air mid‑80s
* UVB lighting: 12‑hour cycle; replace bulb every 6–12 months
* Heating tools: ceramic emitter or basking lamp over platform

## **Water Quality & Maintenance**

Musk turtles produce a high bioload; effective filtration and regular water changes are essential. A canister or strong internal filter should be sized for double the tank volume. Partial water changes (25–50%) weekly help maintain cleanliness. Avoid chlorinated tap water or treat it appropriately before use to prevent respiratory and skin issues.

* Filter: robust, rated for twice tank volume
* Water changes: 25–50% weekly; full change monthly
* Clean water source: conditioned or dechlorinated
* Daily maintenance: skim uneaten food and waste

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Musk turtles are primarily carnivorous, favoring snails, insects, worms, small fish, and aquatic invertebrates. Pelleted diets or turtles blocks can supplement nutrition. Offer protein daily for juveniles; adults can be fed once every two days with vegetables offered occasionally. Calcium supplementation helps maintain shell and bone health.

* Juvenile feeding: daily, high‑protein focus
* Adult feeding: every other day, with occasional veggies
* Protein: earthworms, shrimp, fish, crickets, worms
* Commercial pellets: high-quality turtle formulas
* Supplements: calcium (with D3), multivitamin weekly
* Feeding practice: offer food in a separate container to maintain clean water

## **Healthcare**

Annual veterinary exams—including physical assessment, fecal exam, and occasionally bloodwork—help detect common issues early: respiratory disease, shell softening, parasites, and metabolic bone disease. Look out for signs such as lethargy, lack of appetite, shell lesions, respiratory noise, or discharge.

* Vet visits: initial and annual checkups
* Watch for: swelling, respiratory signs, shell softening, reduced activity
* Common conditions: pneumonia, shell disease, metabolic bone disease, parasites, Salmonella
* Hygiene: always wash hands after tank work

## **Behavior & Handling**

Musk turtles are shy and best appreciated visually rather than being handled frequently. Any handling should involve supporting the body from below. Never grab by limbs or tail. They may bite if startled, so caution is essential, and handwashing afterward is critical for hygiene.

* Handling: scoop gently; minimal interaction
* Behavior: primarily aquatic, occasional land exploration
* Socializing: avoid overcrowding; generally solitary or pair-housed
* Stress signals: hissing musk odor, defensive posture

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Provide varied aquatic environments with hiding spots such as driftwood, PVC pipes, or live plants. Smooth rocks or platforms allow exploration. Rotating décor stimulates curiosity. Ensure basking areas and gentle flow zones to facilitate natural behaviors.

* Hideaways: logs, PVC pipes, plant-covered rocks
* Plant life: live or artificial aquatic vegetation
* Basking access: smooth surfaces and floating docks
* Layer rotation: change décor periodically during maintenance

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* Named "stinkpot" for their ability to release a strong musk when scared, but only rarely does this occur.
* Prefer walking on the bottom rather than swimming, often extending their necks to find food.
* Though small, musk turtles are long-lived and can bond quietly with attentive keepers.
* These turtles are not strong climbers—avoid high basking platforms that risk falls.
* Always disinfect hands after tank contact to reduce Salmonella risk.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Aquarium (≥30 gal), filtration rated double capacity
* Heating system (heater, basking lamp, ceramic emitter)
* UVB lighting (5.0 bulb, 12-hour timer)
* Floating dock or basking platform
* Fine sand or bare-bottom substrate
* Pelleted turtle diet, live/frozen invertebrates
* Calcium and vitamin supplements
* Driftwood, hides, live/artificial plants
* Water conditioner, thermometers, cleaning supplies
* Secure, ventilated carrier for vet visits

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