**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Painted Turtle Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*), including subspecies like eastern, midland, and western, are North American natives known for their distinctive red and yellow shell markings. Adults typically reach 4–12 inches, with females larger than males, and can live 25–50 years in captivity with proper care. They are diurnal aquatic turtles that bask, forage, and sleep submerged in clean water.

## **Housing & Environment**

These turtles require spacious aquatic setups that account for both swimming and basking needs. Water volume should be at least 10 gallons per inch of shell (e.g., 100 gallons for a 10″ turtle). Tanks must have clean, filtered water with depths of about twice the shell width so turtles can surface easily and right themselves if flipped. Provide a dry basking platform, UVB lighting, and ample swimming space, ideally with smooth décor and hiding places.

**Habitat Summary:**

* **Tank size:** ≥10 gal per inch of shell (100–150 gal ideal)
* **Water depth:** ≥2× shell width
* **Basking platform:** Stable, accessible, fully dry area
* **Substrate:** Bare bottom or large smooth stones
* **Decoration:** Driftwood, aquatic plants, floating docks
* **Maintenance:** Spot clean daily; 25–50% water changes weekly

## **Lighting, Temperature & Water Quality**

Maintaining a proper thermal and lighting environment is essential. Warm water to 75–80°F (80–85°F for hatchlings), create a basking spot of 85–95°F, and maintain a 12-hour UVB-lit day/night cycle. Use a reliable filtration system rated above tank volume. Monitor water with regular testing, avoiding chlorine.

**Environmental Settings:**

* **Water temp:** 75–80°F adults; 80–85°F juveniles
* **Basking spot:** 85–95°F
* **Lighting:** 12 hr UVB and heat lamp
* **Filtration:** Strong and efficient; clean weekly
* **Water changes:** Partial weekly; full clean monthly

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Painted turtles transition from carnivorous juveniles to omnivorous adults. Hatchlings eat mostly protein—live or dried insects, earthworms, fish—and pellets. Adults should receive a diet of 50% high-quality aquatic turtle pellets, 40% leafy greens and aquatic plants, and 10% fruit. Calcium supplementation via cuttlebone and weekly multivitamin dusting helps maintain shell health.

**Feeding Essentials:**

* **Juveniles:** Daily protein-focused meals
* **Adults:** Every 2–3 days with mixed diet
* **Pellets:** Formulated turtle diet (~25% of overall diet)
* **Protein:** Insects, fish, worms occasionally
* **Greens:** Dark leafy vegetables, aquatic plants
* **Supplements:** Calcium 2–3×/wk; multivitamin weekly
* **Separation feeding:** Use separate container to preserve water quality

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Monitoring**

Annual veterinary exams—including fecal screening, physical checks, and occasionally bloodwork—are vital, as these reptiles hide early signs of disease. Painted turtles are susceptible to respiratory infections, shell rot, metabolic bone disease, parasitic infections, and Salmonella. Be alert for signs such as swollen eyes, soft shell, poor appetite, coughing, or buoyancy issues. Prompt intervention prevents serious outcomes.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Generally calm and non-aggressive, painted turtles appreciate being observed more than handled. When necessary, support their body fully from below and avoid limb or shell grabs. Limit handling to reduce stress, and always wash your hands before and after interacting to prevent Salmonella transmission.

## **Enrichment & Life Stimulation**

Enrich their environment by rotating décor like logs, plants, and basking platforms. Include hiding spots and floating elements for exploration. Regular swimming, basking routines, and gentle changes enhance mental and physical health.

**Enrichment Checklist:**

* Basking dock and smooth surfaces
* Driftwood and aquatic plants
* Floating structures and varied hiding areas
* Regular layout changes and water feature alterations

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Long-lived pets**: They can live over 50 years—potential lifetime companions.
* **Diurnal behavior**: Active during daylight, bask frequently, then forage underwater.
* **Winter hibernation**: Wild painted turtles hibernate; captive hibernation isn't recommend though and requires veterinary oversight.
* **Disease risk**: Always wash hands—turtles carry Salmonella which can pose health risks to humans.
* **Subspecies differences**: Eastern, midland, southern, and western variants vary in shell pattern and size.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Large aquarium or pond (≥10 gal per inch shell)
* Efficient filter system rated above tank volume
* UVB lighting and basking lamp on timers
* Thermometers for water and basking zone
* Turtle pellets, live/frozen prey, leafy greens, fruits
* Calcium cuttlebone and multivitamin powder
* Substrate alternatives: bare bottom plus décor
* Driftwood, floating docks, aquatic plants
* Water test kit and conditioner
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center 2025*