**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Red-Footed Tortoise Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Red-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonarius*) are medium-sized, tropical tortoises native to South America’s savannas and forest edges. They’re known for their distinctive red or orange scales on their legs and face. Adults typically reach 10–16 inches in length and can weigh 20–30 pounds. With lifespans of 40–60 years (sometimes longer), they’re long-term companions requiring a commitment to proper husbandry, diet, and environmental care.

## **Housing & Environment**

Red-footed tortoises thrive in large enclosures with warm, humid conditions that mimic their tropical environment. Indoors, they need at least **8×4 ft** of floor space per adult. Outdoors in suitable climates (above 65°F), secure pens **≥10×10 ft** are ideal. They benefit from deep substrate (≥6 in) for burrowing and exploring, plus a mix of shaded and sunny areas for thermoregulation.

Enclosures should include hiding places, logs, rocks, and edible plants. Use naturalistic materials to encourage natural behaviors and reduce stress. Outdoor pens must be predator-proof and escape-resistant, with secure fencing dug into the ground.

**Housing Highlights:**

* **Indoor minimum:** 8×4 ft tortoise table or custom pen
* **Outdoor pen:** ≥10×10 ft, secure fencing
* **Substrate:** ≥6 in of soil, cypress mulch, coconut fiber
* **Hides:** Logs, shelters on warm and cool sides
* **Enrichment:** Logs, edible plants, rocks, dig areas
* **Cleaning:** Spot-clean daily, full substrate change monthly

## **Lighting, Heat & Humidity**

Proper heating and lighting are essential for health. Provide **12–14 hrs** of full-spectrum daylight plus a **UVB source** (e.g., T5 HO 10–12%). The basking zone should reach **90–95°F**, with an ambient gradient of **75–85°F** during the day. Nighttime temps can drop to **65–75°F** but should not go lower.

Red-footed tortoises require **high humidity (60–80%)**, maintained through regular misting, moist substrate, and humid hides. A humidity box (e.g., a half log over damp moss) is highly recommended, particularly for juveniles.

**Lighting & Temperature Tips:**

* **Basking area:** 90–95°F
* **Daytime ambient:** 75–85°F
* **Night:** ≥65°F
* **Humidity:** 60–80% overall, 80–90% in humid hides
* **UVB:** 10–12%, 12–14 hrs daily
* **Equipment:** Ceramic heat emitters, thermostats, timers

## **Water & Hydration**

Provide a shallow water dish large enough for the tortoise to soak. Change water daily to maintain hygiene. Regular **soaking 2–3× weekly** in lukewarm water for 15–20 minutes helps maintain hydration and supports healthy shedding, especially in juveniles.

**Hydration Notes:**

* **Dish:** Stable, shallow, easy-entry
* **Cleaning:** Rinse daily, sanitize weekly
* **Soaks:** 2–3× weekly, 15–20 min

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Red-footed tortoises are true omnivores but lean heavily toward herbivory. Their diet in captivity should be **70–80% dark leafy greens and vegetables**, **10–20% fruits**, and **5–10% low-fat animal protein or mushrooms**.

Avoid high-protein mammal-based foods (e.g., dog/cat food) which can cause kidney damage. Feed daily for juveniles and every other day for adults. Calcium with vitamin D3 should be dusted on food **2–3× weekly**, and a reptile-safe multivitamin can be added once weekly.

**Diet Breakdown:**

* **Greens/veggies (70–80%):** Collards, dandelion, escarole, hibiscus leaves, cactus pads
* **Fruits (10–20%):** Papaya, mango, melon, berries (limit sugary fruits)
* **Protein (5–10%):** Mushrooms, occasional hard-boiled egg or low-fat cooked chicken (rarely)
* **Supplements:** Calcium + D3 (2–3×/wk), multivitamin (1×/wk)
* **Feeding frequency:** Daily (juveniles); alternate days (adults)
* **Water-rich foods:** Offer hydrating veggies and fruits regularly

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial exam** soon after acquisition and **annual checkups**. Common health problems include respiratory infections (often from low temperatures or humidity imbalance), shell rot, metabolic bone disease, parasites, and dehydration.

Watch for signs such as nasal discharge, wheezing, lethargy, shell softening, poor appetite, or abnormal stools. Prompt veterinary care is essential for any concerning symptoms. Always wash hands before and after handling to reduce disease risk.

**Health Reminders:**

* **Annual exams:** Physical, fecal testing, bloodwork as needed
* **Common issues:** Respiratory disease, MBD, parasites, shell injuries
* **Warning signs:** Lethargy, eye/nose discharge, swollen limbs, appetite loss
* **Handling hygiene:** Prevent Salmonella spread

## **Behavior & Handling**

Red-footed tortoises are generally calm and curious. With consistent routines, they recognize feeding times and may approach keepers. Handle gently by supporting their body from underneath—never grab by limbs or shell edges. Limit handling to reduce stress.

They enjoy foraging and will investigate new objects and edible plants, making habitat enrichment especially important for well-being.

**Handling Tips:**

* **Style:** Scoop from below; avoid sudden grabs
* **Frequency:** Minimal to reduce stress
* **Behavior:** Curious, gentle, responsive to routine
* **Enrichment:** Foraging opportunities, varied décor

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

A stimulating enclosure supports mental and physical health. Provide varied terrain with logs, rocks, edible safe plants, and hides on both warm and cool sides. Rotate décor monthly to encourage exploration. Outdoor pens should include shaded shelters, edible weeds, and moist soil areas for digging.

**Enrichment Ideas:**

* Natural logs and stones
* Edible plants (hibiscus, dandelion)
* Moist dig boxes
* Water features (shallow soaking dishes)
* Rotating hides and shelters

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* Named for their **bright red or orange leg scales** and facial markings.
* Thrive in **humid, tropical settings**—humidity is crucial to prevent health problems.
* Can live **50–60+ years**, often outlasting owners.
* Known for **gentle, curious** personalities; many will approach for food.
* Require **long-term planning** for responsible ownership.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Large indoor tortoise table (≥8×4 ft) or outdoor pen (≥10×10 ft)
* Deep substrate (soil, cypress mulch, coconut fiber)
* Hide boxes and shelters (warm and cool zones)
* Logs, rocks, edible safe plants
* UVB lighting (10–12%), daylight bulbs, heat lamps
* Ceramic heat emitter or radiant heat panel
* Thermometers, hygrometers, thermostats, timers
* Shallow soaking dish, daily water access
* Fresh greens, veggies, fruits, mushrooms
* Calcium with D3 and reptile multivitamin supplements
* Sanitation tools, carrier for veterinary trips

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