**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Spotted Turtle Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) are small, semi-aquatic North American turtles named for their striking pattern of bright yellow spots on a dark, domed shell. Adults typically reach **4–5 inches** in carapace length. They are long-lived, often reaching **25–50 years** with proper care, and are prized for their gentle, shy nature and manageable size.

In the wild, spotted turtles inhabit shallow wetlands with slow-moving water and dense vegetation. As pets, they require clean, shallow aquatic setups with both water and land access, plus attention to temperature and humidity. Note: They are a **protected species in many areas**, so always confirm that your pet is captive-bred.

## **Housing & Environment**

Spotted turtles thrive in **semi-aquatic setups** that mimic their natural wetland habitats. A single adult requires at least a **40–50 gallon tank**, with roughly **50–70% water** and **30–50% land** areas.

Water depth can be shallow (6–10 inches) with sloped areas or ledges to let them easily rest or surface. Include a secure, stable basking platform that allows them to dry completely. The land area should be planted or include hides to encourage natural behaviors.

**Habitat Highlights:**

* **Tank size:** ≥40–50 gallons for one adult
* **Water depth:** ~6–10 inches, with shallow shelves
* **Land area:** ~30–50% of enclosure, with hides and plants
* **Substrate:** Smooth river rocks, fine sand, soil in land area
* **Basking platform:** Dry, stable, easy-access
* **Décor:** Driftwood, aquatic plants, floating logs
* **Cleaning:** Spot-clean daily; partial water changes weekly

## **Temperature, Lighting & UVB**

Spotted turtles require a **warm water environment** and a **heated basking area**. Maintain water temperature between **72–78°F** (slightly warmer for juveniles). The basking zone should reach **85–90°F**.

Provide **12 hours of UVB lighting daily** over the basking area to support healthy shell and bone development. Even if they bask infrequently, they need the UVB to metabolize dietary calcium properly.

**Lighting & Temperature Tips:**

* **Water temp:** 72–78°F
* **Basking spot:** 85–90°F
* **UVB lighting:** 10–12%, 12 hrs/day
* **Equipment:** Submersible heater, basking lamp with UVB bulb
* **Night temp:** Can safely drop to mid-60s°F

## **Water Quality & Maintenance**

Clean, well-filtered water is essential. Spotted turtles are sensitive to poor water quality and can develop shell or skin infections without proper care.

Use a strong external or canister filter rated for at least **2×** tank volume. Perform **weekly partial water changes (25–50%)** with dechlorinated water. Remove uneaten food daily.

**Water Care Guidelines:**

* **Filtration:** Strong external/canister filter
* **Water changes:** 25–50% weekly
* **Source:** Dechlorinated or conditioned tap water
* **Daily maintenance:** Remove food waste and debris
* **Monitoring:** Check temperature regularly

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Spotted turtles are **opportunistic omnivores**. In the wild, they eat insects, worms, snails, aquatic plants, and carrion. In captivity, offer a varied diet including commercial aquatic turtle pellets, fresh protein, and plant matter.

Feed juveniles daily and adults every **2–3 days**. Protein sources can include earthworms, crickets, mealworms, and thawed frozen fish or shrimp (occasional). Offer dark leafy greens and aquatic plants to encourage natural foraging.

**Diet Guidelines:**

* **Staple:** High-quality aquatic turtle pellets
* **Protein:** Worms, insects, low-fat fish, shrimp
* **Greens:** Romaine, dandelion, collard, aquatic plants
* **Fruits:** Rare, small amounts only
* **Supplements:** Calcium with D3 2–3× weekly; reptile multivitamin 1× weekly
* **Feeding method:** Separate feeding container recommended to keep water clean

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** after acquisition and **annual checkups**. Common issues include **respiratory infections** (most commonly from improper temps or humidity), **shell rot** (from inadequate basking or poor water), **parasites**, and **metabolic bone disease** (from poor UVB or calcium deficiency).

Monitor for signs such as lethargy, wheezing, nasal discharge, shell softness, lack of appetite, or buoyancy issues. Always practice good hygiene—wash hands after contact to reduce risk of **Salmonella** transmission.

**Healthcare Reminders:**

* **Annual vet visits** recommended
* **Watch for:** Respiratory noise, discharge, shell lesions, lethargy
* **Common problems:** Respiratory infection, shell rot, parasites, MBD
* **Prevention:** Proper temps, UVB, clean water

## **Behavior & Handling**

Spotted turtles are **generally shy** but may become bold at feeding time. They prefer observation over frequent handling. When necessary, scoop gently from below and support the body fully. Avoid grabbing by limbs or tail.

Limit handling to reduce stress and maintain health. They often enjoy exploring their enclosure and interacting with new décor or plants.

**Behavior Tips:**

* **Temperament:** Shy, cautious, observant
* **Handling:** Minimal, gentle support from below
* **Signs of stress:** Retreating, hissing, snapping
* **Interaction:** Best observed in well-designed enclosure

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Provide **varied aquatic and terrestrial environments** to mimic their natural wetland habitat. Include submerged branches, floating logs, live or artificial aquatic plants, hiding spots on land, and gentle water movement.

Rotate décor periodically to encourage exploration and reduce boredom. Ensure basking platforms are stable and accessible.

**Enrichment Ideas:**

* Submerged logs and branches
* Live or fake aquatic plants
* Floating basking docks
* Land hides with soil substrate
* Smooth rocks and driftwood

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* Named for **bright yellow spots** on a dark shell—each turtle’s pattern is unique.
* Found throughout **eastern North America** in shallow wetlands and marshes.
* Long-lived—**25–50+ years** is common with proper care.
* Need **both water and land** areas to thrive.
* Require **clean, warm water** and **UVB exposure** for health.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Aquarium (≥40–50 gallons) with land and water zones
* Submersible heater, basking lamp with UVB bulb
* Strong external/canister filter
* Basking platform or floating dock
* Substrate: river rocks, fine sand, soil for land
* Driftwood, rocks, aquatic plants
* Turtle pellets, live/frozen protein sources
* Fresh greens and calcium-rich veggies
* Calcium with D3 and multivitamin supplements
* Water conditioner and test kit
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center 2025*