**YVCipedia REPTILE**

Tegu Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

“Tegu” refers to large lizards of the genus *Salvator* (formerly *Tupinambis*), most commonly the **Argentine black and white tegu (*Salvator merianae*)** kept in captivity. Native to South America’s savannas and forests, they are intelligent, powerful reptiles that can **grow 3–4.5 feet long** and live **15–20+ years** with excellent care.

Tegus are known for their **intelligence** (some compare them to monitor lizards in problem-solving), **tolerance of handling**, and **distinct personalities**. However, they require large enclosures, consistent handling for taming, and a **significant long-term commitment**.

## **Housing & Environment**

Tegus are **large, terrestrial lizards** that need very spacious enclosures. For adults, indoor enclosures should be **at least 8×4×4 ft**. Larger is always better. Outdoor pens (in warm seasons) should be predator-proof and secure.

Provide **deep substrate (12–24 inches)** to allow for burrowing—a natural behavior that also helps with thermoregulation and humidity. Substrates can include cypress mulch, organic topsoil, or coconut fiber blends. Avoid substrates with perlite, fertilizers, or chemicals.

Include multiple **sturdy hides**, logs, branches for climbing, and a large water tub for soaking.

**Housing Highlights:**

* **Indoor minimum:** 8×4×4 ft for adults
* **Outdoor pens:** Predator-proof fencing, partial shade, secure burrow access
* **Substrate depth:** 12–24″ for digging and humidity control
* **Décor:** Large logs, rocks, platforms for climbing
* **Hides:** Multiple, on both warm and cool sides
* **Water tub:** Large enough for full-body soaking
* **Cleaning:** Spot-clean daily; full substrate refresh as needed

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Tegus are **diurnal baskers** that need strong heating and UVB.

**Basking area:**

* **Temperature:** 100–110°F
* Use halogen flood bulbs or ceramic heat emitters on thermostats/dimmers.

**Cool side:**

* **Temperature:** 75–85°F

**Nighttime temps:**

* Can safely drop to **70–75°F**.

**UVB:**

* High-output T5 HO 10–12% UVB tube over basking zone.
* Provide 12–14 hours of daylight.

**Humidity:**

* Maintain **60–80%** overall.
* Achieved with deep, moist substrate, daily misting, and a large water basin.
* Provide a humid hide or burrow area.

**Heating & Lighting Tips:**

* Use overhead basking bulbs for top-down heat.
* Thermostat control is essential to prevent overheating.
* UVB is critical for calcium metabolism and preventing MBD.
* Use digital thermometers/hygrometers to monitor gradients.

## **Water & Hydration**

Tegus **love to soak** and need a **large, sturdy water tub** big enough for full-body soaking.

* Change water **daily** to prevent bacterial growth.
* Clean and disinfect weekly.
* Regular soaks help with hydration and shedding.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Tegus are **omnivores**, but their dietary needs change with age:

* **Juveniles (typically up to 2 years of age):** More insect and protein-heavy.
* **Adults:** Balanced mix of protein, fruits, and vegetables.

**Staple proteins:**

* Whole prey (appropriately sized mice, chicks)
* Insects (dubia roaches, crickets, superworms)
* Lean meats (ground turkey, cooked eggs—sparingly)

**Plant matter:**

* Dark leafy greens (collards, dandelion, escarole)
* Squash, green beans
* Fruits (berries, mango, melon) as treats

**Feeding schedule:**

* Juveniles: Daily small meals
* Adults: 3–4× weekly balanced meals

**Supplementation:**

* Calcium with D3: 2–3× weekly for growing juveniles; 1–2× weekly for adults.
* Multivitamin: 1× weekly.

**Feeding Tips:**

* Avoid dog/cat food (too high in fat and additives).
* Never feed toxic foods (e.g., avocado, rhubarb).
* Always offer varied, whole-food-based diets to ensure balanced nutrition.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial vet exam** after acquisition and **annual checkups**. Common health concerns include:

* **Metabolic bone disease (MBD)** from poor UVB or calcium deficiency.
* **Obesity** from overfeeding or fatty diets.
* **Respiratory infections** from poor humidity or cold temps.
* **Parasites**, internal or external.

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness.
* Refusal to eat.
* Labored breathing.
* Swollen limbs or jaw deformities.
* Discharge from nose or mouth.

Prompt veterinary care can prevent minor issues from becoming serious.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Tegus are **smart, curious, and can become very tame** with regular, gentle handling. However, they’re **strong, fast, and have powerful jaws**.

* Start slow: Let them get used to your presence.
* Support their entire body when lifting.
* Never grab by the tail—they can whip defensively.
* Be cautious with feeding to avoid accidental bites.
* Supervise around children or other pets.

**Handling Tips:**

* Frequent, calm interaction builds trust.
* Avoid sudden movements or loud noises.
* Monitor body language for signs of stress.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Tegus benefit from **complex environments** and mental stimulation.

**Enrichment ideas:**

* Deep substrate for digging and burrowing.
* Rotating logs, rocks, and décor.
* Puzzle feeders or hidden treats.
* Occasional supervised exploration in secure rooms or outdoor pens.
* Safe climbing opportunities.

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* Tegus can **brumate** (a reptilian hibernation) in cooler seasons—this should be discussed with your vet and rarely do we at YVC recommend this.
* They have a **forked tongue** like snakes, using it to sense their environment.
* Known for **remarkable intelligence**—some can even be target-trained.
* Can **bond with keepers**, recognizing them and learning routines.
* Argentine black and white tegus tolerate cooler temps better than other species, but still need proper heat and humidity.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Large enclosure (≥8×4×4 ft) with secure lid
* Deep, diggable substrate (cypress mulch, organic soil)
* High-output UVB light (T5 HO 10–12%)
* Basking heat lamps or ceramic emitters on thermostats
* Large water tub for soaking
* Multiple sturdy hides
* Logs, rocks, climbing branches
* Digital thermometers and hygrometers
* Calcium with D3 and reptile multivitamin
* Feeding tongs and cleaning supplies
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

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