

# Russian Tortoise

*Testudo horsfieldii*

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Adult Size:	4 ½ – 6 inches in diameter. Around 9 inches from head to tail.
Life Span:	40 – 50 years.
Male/Female Differences:	Adult males are slightly smaller than females. Also, males have a convex plastron (belly, or underside of the shell), while a female's is flat.
Compatibility:	Tortoises of the same species can easily be kept in groups as long as care is taken to make sure all of them are eating sufficiently. Breeding pairs may become aggressive with each other and need to be separated.
Origin:	Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan
Climate:	Hot and arid most of the year. Russian tortoises evolved to hibernate during cold winter temperatures, and estivate (a similar state of dormancy) during dry summer periods.
Day Cycle:	Either diurnal (most active during the day) or crepuscular (dawn and dusk) depending on the temperature.
Temperature:	95-105°F during the day with a 15° drop at night, but not lower than 75°, unless the tortoise is being hibernated (not recommended).
Lighting:	Tortoises need a source of UVB light in order to metabolize calcium. If you are keeping your tortoise indoors, this should be provided in the form of a reptile fluorescent or mercury vapor bulb.
Humidity:	Humidity should be low inside the cage, but your tortoise will benefit from a daily soak for ten or fifteen minutes in warm water. This will help keep it clean and hydrated.
Habitat/Territory:	Desert, brushland.
Substrate/Bedding:	A sand substrate appropriate for reptiles, dry mulch, or woodchips are good choices. Avoid anything that could cause distress if ingested. Cage carpet or newspaper are safe choices if changed frequently.

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Hiding Place/Den:	Russians like to dig down in their substrate, and would appreciate an artificial burrow or shady area in their enclosure.
Cage Type:	Glass terrariums at least 30 inches long for one tortoise, larger for several. Pretty much any container that can be safely heated and has walls high enough to keep the tortoise inside can be a good enclosure (kiddie pools being a common choice). Having a tub for soaking is a good accompaniment to the cage itself.
Diet:	A good, rotating variety of dark leafy greens. Mustard, turnip, and dandelion greens are some examples. Tortoises are hind-gut fermenters, which means their system is designed to process large amounts of low-nutrient plant matter. Their diet should be high in calcium and fiber, low in fat, and again: variety is important above all. Avoid all animal matter.
Supplements:	Calcium powder 5-7 day per week. Supplement a multivitamin once or twice per week.
Diet Precautions:	Feeding too much of one or two kinds of veggie will cause nutritional deficiencies in you tortoise. A low calcium diet or lack of proper lighting can cause shell deformities or metabolic bone disease.
Feeding:	Feed your tortoise daily. Wild tortoises will eat up to 50 different kinds of plants over the course of a year, so rotate the veggies you feed. Keep hay available all the time for fiber. A small snack of fruit can be offered as a treat. Tortoise especially relish red berries.
Water Source:	A shallow dish of water that the tortoise cannot knock over should be kept in the enclosure. Your tortoise should be soaked for ten minutes or so in warm water every day to keep it hydrated.
Grooming:	Frequent soaking will help maintain healthy skin and shell.
Oral and Foot Care:	Nails can become overgrown in captivity and may need to be trimmed periodically. This can be done by your veterinarian or here at Wilmette Pet.
Proper Handling:	Hold your tortoise securely with two hands so as not to drop it.
Habitat Maintenance:	Remove any feces as soon as you see it. Change sand substrates every four months or so, mulch or woodchips every month, and newspaper or cage carpet as soon as it is soiled. Use this opportunity to disinfect the cage with a 5% bleach solution.
Health Concerns:	Respiratory infections (discharge from nose or mouth, closed eyes, listlessness) resulting from improper temperature. Metabolic bone disease (swollen or bowed limbs, listlessness, refusal to feed) can result from lack of calcium supplementation or improper lighting. Nutritional deficiencies arriving from improper diet.