

# African Spurred Tortoise

*Geochelone sulcata*

Adult Size:	20-26 inches, up to 110 pounds
Life Span:	The oldest recorded specimen in captivity is 54, but may live much longer.
Male/Female Differences:	Males have a concave plastron (belly part of the shell) and a longer tail than females. The angle between the scutes (shell segments) closest to the tortoise's vent is wider in males; this is the most reliable way of sexing juveniles.
Compatibility:	Males should not be housed together, as they can be quite aggressive.
Origin:	Wide distribution throughout sub-Saharan Africa including: Ethiopia, Niger, and Senegal.
Climate:	Hot and arid. These animals have adapted to live on the desert's edge.
Day Cycle:	Diurnal (awake during the day)
Temperature:	95° during the day with a basking point. Temperature should drop 10-15° at night. Tortoises can handle temp as low as 70° at night.
Lighting:	Like all lizards, sulcata need a source of UVB in order to synthesize vitamin D and properly metabolize calcium. As a basking animal this is especially important for tortoises.
Humidity:	These tortoises are used to an arid environment. Soak your tortoise several times weekly in shallow (tortoises sink), tepid water to keep them hydrated.
Habitat/Territory:	Savannah. Grassland.
Substrate/Bedding:	Suitable reptile sand substrate, aspen/alfalfa pellets, or mulch all make acceptable substrates (sulcata like to burrow), though be cautious of accidental ingestion. Cage carpet makes a safe and sterile substrate.

Hiding Place/Den:	Spurred tortoises love to burrow, and appreciate a feeling of enclosure. Artificial dens like half-logs or sections of cork-bark will be favorites of your tortoise.
Cage Type:	Hatchlings and juveniles can be housed in glass aquaria, but as your tortoise grows you will want to construct a pen, the larger the better. An area of 8x4 feet is suitable for a single tortoise. Puppy gates and playpens work well for sectioning of an area where heat/UV basking areas can be provided. Be careful to avoid chilly flooring.
Diet:	Sulcata tortoises are grazing herbivores. Their digestive system has evolved to process large amounts of nutrient-poor foods. The majority of their diet should be hay, such as alfalfa, orchard grass, or timothy hay. Supplement the hay with a good variety of fresh vegetables. Avoid feeding too much of any one veggie.
Supplements:	A calcium supplement should be provided daily, and a reptile vitamin once or twice per week.
Diet Precautions:	Avoid feeding too many 'wet' veggies as this can lead to digestive upset. Do not feed bugs or meat to your tortoise. Be wary of commercial tortoise diets, as these may be too high in protein.
Feeding:	Your tortoise should be fed daily. A slight decrease in feeding during winter months is to be expected.
Water Source:	A shallow dish from which the tortoise can bend its head down and drink. The tortoise should also be soaked several (3-4) times weekly, or every day if you can, in shallow, tepid water.
Grooming:	Soaking your tortoise will help to keep it clean.
Oral and Foot Care:	Nails and beak may become overgrown in captivity. Placing rough edged rocks in the enclosure, while taking care to ensure the tortoise cannot hurt or flip itself, can help to wear down nails. Nails can be trimmed if overgrown by us at Wilmette Pet or by your exotic veterinarian. An overgrown beak can be filed down with a nail file.
Proper Handling:	Hold your tortoise firmly with two hands. Avoid putting hands near its head, as a startled tortoise may pinch your fingers as it retreats into its shell.
Habitat Maintenance:	Remove feces and change water daily. Substrate should be changed every four to six weeks, or when it begins to smell.
Health Concerns:	Calcium deficiency or lack of proper lighting can lead to metabolic bone disease, characterized by soft limbs, inactivity, or refusal to feed. Over supplementation or too much protein in the diet can lead to pyramiding of the shell. Too cool temperature can cause respiratory infections.