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Desert Agamas

Some lizards from the family Agamidae

An Introductory Information Leaflet from



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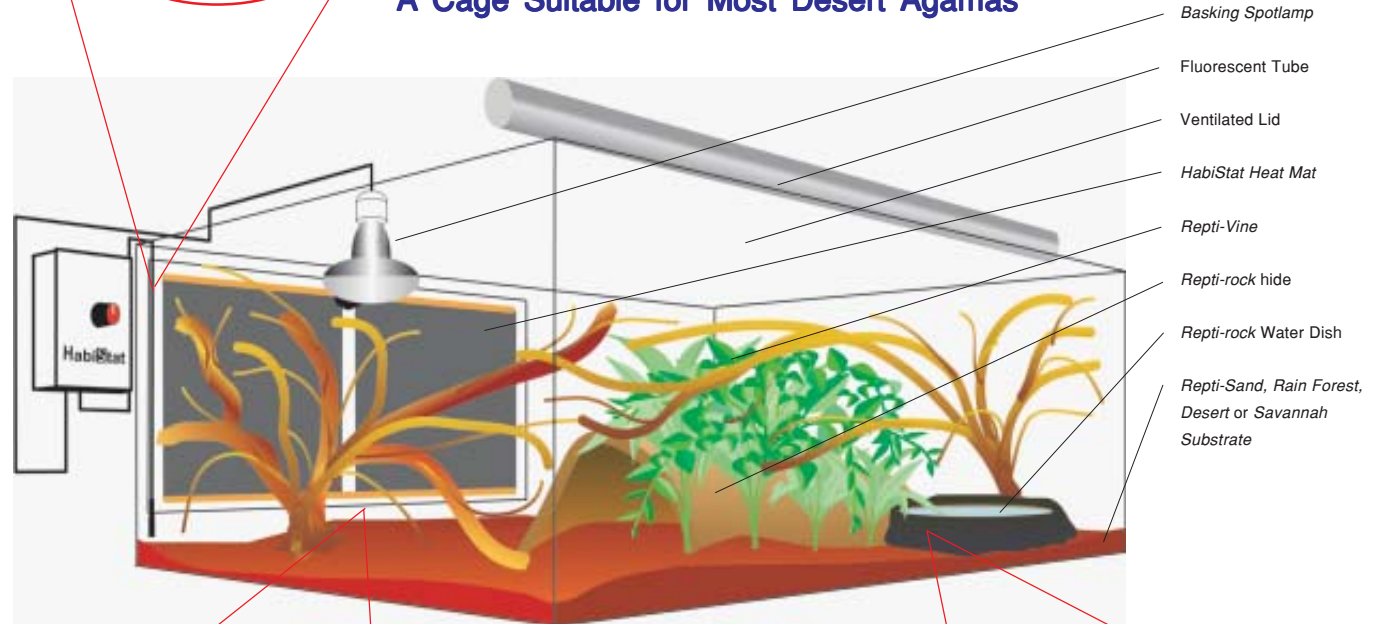
Background Heat

Use a heat mat between half and two thirds the size of the cage to provide background heating. The hottest spot in the cage should not be above 40°C while the coolest should not be below 22°C. Use a *HabiStat Mat - Stat* if the temperature is too hot but put the whole cage in a cooler place if the temperature is not cool enough.

Food: Crickets, Locusts, Mealworms, and as a special treat Waxworms. Supplement livefoods by dusting insects with *Repton* or feeding *Cricket Diet*. Some individuals may also accept a commercially prepared, pelleted diet for lizards and thawed rodent pups. Water should be fresh and changed every day. These lizards may also eat an amount of fresh sweet fruit.

Cleanliness and Hygiene: A routine cleaner for all non-porous surfaces could be *Vetaclene*. Anything that cannot be easily cleaned should be thrown away and replaced. Any little graze or blemish on the animals themselves would benefit from the first aid afforded by dabbing the wound with *Vetadine*. As far as human hygiene is concerned, *Vetasept Surgical Scrub* will clean hands and surfaces while *Vetasept Hand Rub* will allow adequate cleansing and disinfection even in cases when water is unavailable.

A Cage Suitable for Most Desert Agamas



Hot Spot

A local area of higher temperature can be created with a *Basking Spotlamp* or a ceramic heater. Use the latter two in conjunction with a *HabiStat* thermostat for precise control. Hot spots should be maintained for the same day length as the lights, sixteen hours in summer, eight in winter.

Cage Decor: *Repti-Sand, Desert, Savannah or Rain Forest Substrates*, all used bone dry as the cage base. These will blot up and 'clump' any fouling by the lizards. Clumps of waste can be removed without cleaning the whole tank out. *Cork Bark* could be used to make an interesting three dimensional display. Draping *Repti-Vines* in the cage will provide refuges the lizards can hide in or move through to loosen shedding skin. *Repti-rock* caves and water dishes would lend even more functionality and security.

Cage Set Up

The cage should be set up to allow an active lizard plenty of scope to climb, bask in a hot spot, move to a cooler spot, drink and hunt for food. The lizards should also be able to secrete themselves into refuges and rub themselves against something when shedding their skin.

Shopping List

Minimum for a juvenile lizard:

- Vivaria
- Basking Spot Lamp
- UVB Lights
- Thermometer
- Repti-rock Dish & Hide
- Repti-Sand
- Repton

Other items that may be purchased include those in the following list. Not all are required and several alternatives are suggested.

- **HabiStat, Heat Mats** (6x11/7w, 11x11/12w, 17x11/20w, 23x11/28w, 29x11/35w, 35x11/42w & 49x11/55w) & **Strips** (17x6/10w, 23x6/15w, 35x6/22w & 47x6/30w)
- **Black Magic Ceramic Heaters** (60w, 100w, 150w, 250w, Reflectors & Holders)
- **Basking Spot Lamps** (60w, 10w, Natural, Red Night & Blue Daylight)
- **Thermometers** (Spot, dial, minimum - maximum & electronic digital)
- **Hygrometers** (Dial & electronic digital)
- **HabiStat Thermostats & Accessories** (Mat-Stat 100w, Temperature Thermostat 300w, Twin Channel Thermostat 2x300w, Dimming Thermostat 600w, Pulse Proportional Thermostat 600w, both the last two models are available with a night time temperature drop facility.)
- **Sun, Moon & Sun & Moon Switches, Night Eye, Cool Control Thermostats and MiniFans.**
- **Repti-rock Dishes Hides & Caves**
- **Repti-Vines**
- **Repti-Sand**
- **Rain Forest Substrate**
- **Savannah Substrate**
- **Cork Bark**
- **Reptile D₃ Lights** (18"/15w & 24"/20w & 23w compact)
- **Reptile Natural Sunlight Lights** (18"/15w & 24"/20w & 20w compact)
- **Repti Glo 2.0, 5.0 & 8.0 Lights** (15" 14w, 18"/15w & 24"/20w)
- **Arcadia Control Units** (15w, 2x15w, 18w, 2x18w, 20w & 2x20w)
- **Crickets** &/or **Locusts** &/or **Mealworms** & **Waxworms**
- **Repton**
- **Cricket Diet**
- **Reptasol**
- **ProBalance**
- **Vetaclean**
- **Vetadine**
- **Vetasept Surgical Scrub**
- **Vetasept Hand Rub**
- **Books & Leaflets**



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Agamas...

...Biology

Most agamas are medium sized lizards from the old world and Australia. The tail is about half the total length. They are usually modestly coloured but depending on how the mood takes them they can have quite colourful flashes and patterns. They inhabit many types of habitat but the desert forms seem to do best in captivity.

...Housing

Agamas are best housed in as large a cage as possible. Because of their rapid rate of growth and the heating and lighting equipment they need, purpose made vivaria are probably the most appropriate. The types with sliding glass doors to the front being especially resistant to escape.

As a guide the cage should be a minimum 60 cm x 30 cm x 30 cm for a single medium sized specimen but 90 cm x 30 cm x 30 cm for an adult pair. Of course, the cage could be larger as this would allow the animal room to grow and make it easier for the owner to manage the environment. The cage should be set up in a manner similar to the diagram over leaf. It will be necessary to provide a local hot spot near 40°C, while the coolest part of the cage should be nearer 22°C. The hot spot can easily be arranged by installing a *Basking Spot Lamp*. To ensure the cage does not overheat, the lamp is best controlled with a *HabiStat Dimming Thermostat*. White and UV light, from a lamp like a Reptile D₃ tube or compact, will be needed and should be present for a similar period; about sixteen hours per day in summer dropping to eight in winter.

Much of the success achieved in keeping Agamas will come from the skilful manipulation of ventilation. The lizards require lowish humidity and cannot stand stagnant air conditions. Fresh air moving into the cage is essential. Use the upward draughts caused by heated air rising to flush out the cage and drag fresh air in. Another method would be to use a HabiStat MiniFan, possibly in conjunction with a complementary HabiStat Cool Control. A very light occasional misting with a hand sprayer will provide any humidity required but the cage must dry out completely within about half an hour.

...Husbandry

Agamas may be kept singly or in groups. Of course the more lizards kept in each cage, the larger the cage should be. Males will tend to fight as they reach maturity and no more than one should be present in the cage. In any case, there should be plenty of retreats and visual screens. Watch out for bullying, particularly among juveniles.

To handle an agama the whole animal should be gently grasped and held in the hands. One hand beneath, supporting and the other grasping the animal's shoulders, controlling it. These animals do not like being handled but with time will just about tolerate brief encounters. The tail is easily shed and should not be grasped. Once shed, however, a new tail will regrow in time.

In time the cage will begin to look scruffy as faeces and debris builds up. As everything recommended for the cage is washable or disposable, a good clean out is easily done. Eight to ten weeks would be about as long as the cage could be left before being completely cleaned. The cage set up advised in this leaflet is practicable and can be made to look pleasing to the eye. If a more natural set up

is envisaged, it may be best to wait until some experience is gained. In any case, some of the very informative books on Lizards in general and Agamas in particular could be investigated.

...Food & Feeding

Insects like small crickets and locusts form the staple diet in captivity. Mealworms can also be fed. Both crickets and mealworms should be dusted with *Repton*. Alternatively, the insect food can be fed *Cricket Diet* to 'load' the insect with vitamins and minerals but do not do both! Other insects that are eaten include Waxworms but these are best given only occasionally as a treat. Another occasional meal that may be accepted are the commercially prepared, pelleted lizard diets or a frozen rodent pup that has been thoroughly thawed. With all food it is important to balance the nutrients. These lizards grow very rapidly, so any dietary deficiency will quickly result in deformity. Calcium and the associated vitamin D₃ being particularly important.

Live food is only eaten if it is seen to move and will usually be jumped upon and grabbed with the mouth. One lizard may eat up to ten or more insects at one meal; it will depend upon their size. Feed the lizards every other day with just enough to be completely eaten in fifteen minutes. Try not to leave an excess of uneaten insects in the cage.

In addition to live food a portion of sweet fruit or puried fruit baby food may be offered. Leafy salads are also eaten. Leave this type of food in a small container for as long as remains fresh.

A small water dish kept full of fresh water should always be available. The lizards will drink from this but should not be allowed to bathe in it. Some lizards will only drink water droplets by licking off a surface like a rock, plant or even the cage wall. A light spray will provide these drops but the cage must dry out completely within half an hour.

...Reproduction

Male agamas are proportionately larger than the females and they have broader heads. There may be some coloured patterning in the mature male and the base of the tail is swollen with the copulatory organs.

A period of courtship proceeds mating and during this time much activity can be expected. Eggs are laid after mating and they may take several weeks to hatch. To grow to adult in captivity may take as short a time as twelve months but in the wild, two to five years may elapse. A cooler winter period will be needed to condition the lizards for breeding in the following season.

...Health & Disease

Agamas live for many years in the wild but seem to live even longer in captivity. They do not suffer from many diseases and veterinary attention is rarely needed. An environment and diet as described in this leaflet will preclude most problems. The most often encountered disease will be a metabolic bone disorder caused by insufficient vitamin D₃ or calcium. Good practice, hygiene and first aid will probably deal with rest. If real disease is discovered, a vet must of course, be consulted. Pet lizards do not pose a real threat to human health. All the normal hygiene precautions regarding humans and animals should, however, be observed.