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## BEARDED DRAGONS

These animals are called Bearded Dragons and there is a ton of information available to you. Not only will I provide you with some basics to get started, but also they are one of the most common reptiles sold on the market today in terms of popularity, numbers, and due to the fact they make wonderful pets. So you will also find a lot of good info. out there on the Internet, as well as at your local library.

Choosing a bearded dragon is as simple as going to pretty much any pet store these days. The age of the animal you buy will determine how long you will have them around. A beardy can live for 10 - 15 years so the bigger they are, the older they are, and less life span is left. You can almost always find a variety of size and age at most pet stores. You want to look for an animal that is active and alert. It should pay attention to you and follow you with its eyes as you move from side to side of the cage. Ask the pet store to feed it while you are there and see if it actively chases down prey or simply sits there. You want an active animal, because that means less stress and more health.

You should house the animal in a room where the temperature stays consistent. A bedroom is fine as long as you don't put the tank in front of a window or under the vent. I suggest a minimum tank size of 40 gallons and prefer a 60-gallon tank or larger which will last the animal its' entire life. Cheap tanks can be found in the Penny Savers and Save-A-Bucks found at most gas stations, or online through something like Craig's List. The substrate I use and prefer is Aspen Bedding. It is cheaper than most of your other choices and keeps the enclosure smelling better. Buy the biggest bag for the best savings and put an inch to an inch and a half on the bottom of enclosure. A large bag usually runs around \$15. However, if you notice your animal ingesting any of the shavings he might be too small still for them. I usually use newspaper until the animal is as long as my hand. You can use newspaper, artificial turf, or the Calci Sand. NEVER use pine or cedar shavings as this can cause serious harm to your new pet. You can spot clean the enclosure as needed and change substrate altogether once a month. You want a water bowl big enough for the animal to soak in and not too deep so that they could drown. Water should be changed at least every 3 days and kept on the cool side of the tank. Use a human heating pad purchased at a drug store for a heat source. Place the pad on one half of the bottom of enclosure helping to create a hot side. Use the heating pad according to temperature changes in the house and outside. I usually never use more than the medium setting. If you buy a "reptile heating pad" you will spend around \$50 as opposed to the \$15 human version. You want to purchase a clamp lamp from a hardware store and a UV Day Bulb from the pet store no more than a 50-watt with 5.0 rating or higher and this should be put on one side of the enclosure as well so that the animal can get away from it if he wants to. Usually you want some sort of structure like a hide log, or climbing branch underneath the lamp so that the animal can bask when it wants to. The light should be on during regular daylight hours just like we have. They are active during the day and sleep at night. It is safe to handle the animal once a day when they are babies and as they grow older you can do more handling for greater periods. When they are babies they do tend to want to hop and run around a bit and as they mature they tend to just hang out in one spot.

Lastly, feed your bearded dragon a mixture of foods. Feed crickets, wax worms and mealworms once every other day or every 3 days. You want to feed just enough that they eat most if not all the bugs offered. Choose one to feed each time: they do not need all three offered at the same time. Usually a baby will eat around 10 crickets at a time/10 wax worms/10 mealworms. All three can be purchased at the local pet store and are relatively inexpensive. You also want to offer every 2 - 3 days fresh green lettuce such as romaine, green leaf or red leaf chopped up small enough so not to choke the animal. You will also want to offer some other veggies like shredded carrot, cucumbers, corn, broccoli, etc. Fruit can be offered on a less frequent basis such as once every couple weeks. It is high in sugar and that can cause an issue if overdone. Avoid spinach and eggplant as they can also be toxic and cause even death. They can be picky with these so don't get discouraged. Offer a variety and see what he likes. Advice from us is always free so call or email if you have more questions. Good luck my friend, keep us posted, and remember that advice is always free!