

# Redfoot Tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*)

## Introduction to Redfoot Tortoises

Captive-hatched Redfoot tortoises are among the best pet tortoises. They stay relatively small (12 to 16" for most types). They are hardy and long-lived and can make wonderful pets.

## Indoor Enclosure

The most common form of indoor accommodation for small or medium sized Redfoot Tortoises is a large terrarium. Keepers can use plastic tubs, wooden cages, and other enclosures, but plastic bins and stock tanks are ideal as they are large, easy to clean, and they come in a variety of sizes. Of course, as the tortoise grows, it will need larger and larger enclosures. A small Redfoot can survive well in an enclosure that measures 12" x 24" x 12" high but a pair of adult Redfoots will require an enclosure that is at least 4' wide x 6' long.

The substrate for Redfoots can be a mixture of ½ sand and ½ peat moss. A layer of cypress mulch, dead leaves, and damp sphagnum moss can be placed over the top of the substrate to help hold in moisture. The substrate can be kept drier if a large water source is provided. This should be a shallow saucer for small specimens and a larger saucer or cat litter pan for larger specimens. The space underneath the Redfoot's favorite shelter should be sprayed with water once or twice a week to keep this area especially moist. This will make sure that the tortoise's shell growth is smooth and natural.

Heat should be provided using a heat-emitting bulb in a lamp from overhead. The heat-emitting bulbs will provide a basking spot of 90° F (32° C) at one end of the enclosure. UVB is necessary for Vitamin D3 production for all diurnal reptiles in captivity, even these shade-loving tortoises. Indoor enclosures should offer a warm area, created by adding a heat mat under one end of the enclosure, especially in cooler homes.

## Outdoor Enclosure

Redfoots benefit from being kept outdoors for all or part of their lives. They received doses of UVB radiation, environmental heat, and, of course enjoy a connection to the grass, plants, and soil found in outdoor pens. Outdoor enclosures should offer shelter from heat, a secure place to rest, and a water source. Food can be offered to tortoises and can be supplemented by plantings of some of their favorite grasses, fruits, and vegetables within the enclosure. A keeper must be very diligent to make sure that outdoor enclosures are escape-proof and predator-proof.

## Decorations

A variety of shelters can be offered to give young tortoises a feeling of security. We add large pieces of curved cork bark, large banana leaves, piles of straw or hay, or grass clippings for the tortoises to use as shelter. The shelter should be located at the cooler end of the enclosure and not directly above the heat mat.

## Handling Redfoot Tortoises

As shy babies, most Redfoot Tortoises will not enjoy being handled. They will often retreat into their shells and stay tightly wedged in with their large, scaly legs covering their heads. Of course, there are always exceptions and occasionally very outgoing, almost tame, Redfoot Tortoises are seen. These are usually specimens that have been raised from small, captive-hatched babies and which are open to daily interactions.

## Feeding Redfoot Tortoises

Redfoots are omnivores, eating both animal and plant material in nature. In captivity most keepers offer them a mixed salad of fruits and vegetables every other day. They should also be fed some higher protein items once or twice a week. Dead mice, Mazuri Tortoise Diet® and other commercial foods are also great additions to the Redfoot's diet.



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