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Red Ear Sliders

(Scientific Name: *Chrysemys scripta elegans*)



Introduction:

The natural range of the Red Ear Slider is the eastern half of the United States, although it can now be found worldwide, due to people releasing pet turtles that they could no longer care for. **Keeping a Red Ear Slider as a pet is much more complicated than most people realize, requiring a great deal of time and money.** While the turtle itself may not be expensive, providing the proper habitat, food and veterinary care is costly—especially as the turtle grows. The Red Ear Slider can live up to 50 years with proper care, so give the matter very careful consideration before choosing a turtle as a pet, and consider adopting a turtle from a rescue organization instead of buying one from a pet store.

Size:

Those 4-inch baby turtles in the store sure look cute, but an adult turtle will reach 7-12 inches!

Housing:

A Red Ear Slider needs a lot of space! You need to provide 10 gallons of tank for each inch of shell length. That means if your turtle grows to be 12" long, it will need a 120-gallon tank—that's going to weigh over 1,000 pounds! A plastic stock tank is a durable and moderately inexpensive option. No substrate is needed for Red Ear Slider enclosures. If desired, you can use large, smooth river rocks or sand. DO NOT use gravel; it can be ingested and cause severe problems.

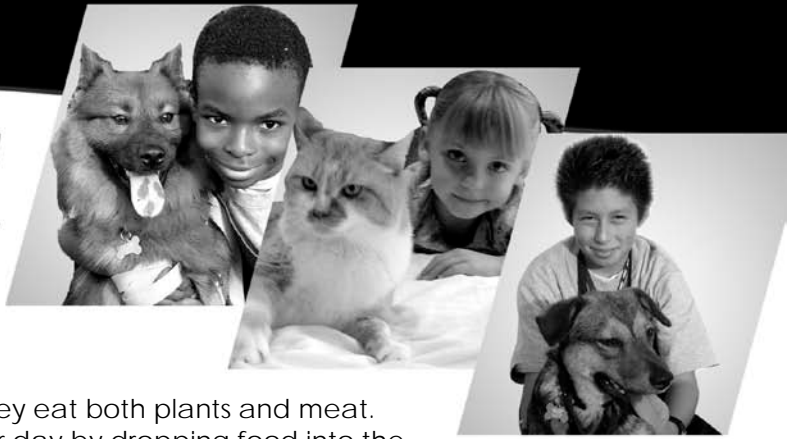
Provide at least one basking area so the turtle can easily climb out and fully dry its shell. You can build one yourself by stacking smooth rocks or bricks, or using driftwood, fixed PVC, etc. Make sure your turtle cannot climb out of its enclosure—they are very good climbers! Use a tight-fitting screen or lid to prevent escape and the ensuing hard fall, which can be very dangerous.

Water/Filters:

A Red Ear Slider needs water that is at least twice as deep as its shell is long. Water quality is critical to the health of your turtle: you will need to change the water weekly. You can use tap water, but it must be treated to remove chlorine first. Test water quality regularly and treat the water as needed. Use a quality filter to help capture waste and break down harmful elements.

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Feeding:

Red ear sliders are omnivores, meaning they eat both plants and meat. Feed juveniles daily and adults every other day by dropping food into the water. Provide a variety of foods, including aquatic turtle pellets, trout chow, dandelion and turnip greens, and green and red leaf lettuce, along with live food like guppies, snails, crickets and earthworms. Add a complete reptile vitamin and mineral supplement to the food once or twice a week, and provide a cuttlebone for extra calcium.

Note: Red Ear Sliders must eat in the water because they do not produce saliva, so feeding your turtle in a separate container can reduce cleanup in the main tank.

Light/Heating:

Water temperature should be kept between 75-78°F (78-80°F for hatchlings)—buy a water thermometer to monitor the temperature. Use a submersible water heater if necessary, but make sure to protect it by placing it behind something (e.g., bricks) or fashioning a cover. A broken heater is a potentially lethal situation.

Air temperature should be maintained at 75-80°F with a basking spot of 90-95°F. Use an incandescent light to provide a basking spot, but be sure the turtle cannot touch the light or cause it to fall into the water. In addition, provide a full-spectrum UVA/UVB reptile light for your turtle—this is crucial to maintain overall health. These bulbs must be replaced every 6-10 months.

Questions to ask before choosing a Red Ear Slider as a pet:

- ❖ Do I want a pet that doesn't want to be cuddled and touched?
- ❖ Can I accommodate an **extremely large habitat** requiring an electrical heat source, lighting and filtration system?
- ❖ Do I have the **time** to provide daily care for this turtle?
- ❖ Do I have the **resources** to care for this turtle? (Set-up costs for a young turtle can reach as much as \$300. As the turtle grows, so will the amount of money required to care for it.)
- ❖ Am I ready to make a **life-long commitment** to a pet that may live for 50 years?
- ❖ **Parents:** Are you prepared to take over primary care for this pet? (Red Ear Sliders require more time and effort than most children are capable of providing.)
- ❖ **Note:** All turtles are potential carriers of infectious disease and salmonella. Always wash your hands well after handling your turtle or its habitat to prevent the spread of disease.

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