

Tortoise Hibernation

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Do's and Don'ts



Did you know that at least 6 million tortoises have died in Britain, mainly in hibernation, since they were first imported for the pet trade in the 1940s? We can make hibernation much safer for our tortoises, by following some simple steps:

DO	DON'T
<p>Get your tortoise ready for hibernation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure it is a species which naturally hibernates • Giving a Vet check • Weighing in grams – monthly weight checks are a good way to make sure your tortoise is healthy • Measuring straight shell length in millimetres • Comparing weight and length on Bone ratio (see the following web site for details of how to compare tortoise shell length with weight for a safe hibernation weight range: http://www.tortoiseclub.org/CareSheets/Hibernation%20in%20Mediterranean%20Tortoise%20s.pdf) • Giving regular warm baths to allow full hydration before hibernation • Stopping feeding for 3-4 weeks before hibernation to ensure the guts are empty which prevents unwanted bacterial action and gas production during hibernation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect your tortoise to hibernate without help e.g. outside in the garden • Hibernate an underweight Tortoise • Let him hibernate in the garden • Hibernate your tortoise if it has been ill, has a runny nose, or any lumps or wounds • Hibernate your female tortoise if you know she has eggs • Leave everything to chance – tortoises do not naturally live in the UK – the climate here is unsuitable for them without human support • Without their owner's help, tortoises are unlikely to survive hibernation unsupervised in a garden in most parts of the UK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a safe place which is frost-free and safe from rodents • Put the tortoise inside a strong cardboard box, large enough for her to turn around in. • Put this box inside another wooden box, for extra insulation and protection. • Do not seal the box. • Use polystyrene chips or shredded paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the loft or a wooden shed – the temperature fluctuations will be too great – freezing is very likely • Use hay or straw around the tortoise – both contain many fungal spores and bacteria which may be harmful to the tortoise if breathed in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a place with suitable temperatures - Between 3 and 10°C – ideally around 5 °C • Use a maximum-minimum thermometer to check the temperature every day • Alternatively use a fridge set at 5 °C – much the best option for temperature control and safety • Open the fridge door regularly to allow air exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the temperature to fall below 3 °C for more than 24 hours – the temperature must stay above 3 °C otherwise the tortoise will start to freeze • Allow the temperature to rise above 10°C – the tortoise will start to wake up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your tortoise's weight each month. You can do this without waking him. He should not lose more than 1% of his weight in one month. A 1000g Tortoise should not lose more than 10g in one month. • Wake your tortoise up after a maximum of 6 - 8 weeks. Often hibernation is only 6 - 8 weeks in the wild. Small/young tortoises may only need 3 - 4 weeks asleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not put the Tortoise back into hibernation after he wakes up. The tortoise can only cope with one hibernation in any given year • Do not keep the tortoise in hibernation if he urinates – this indicates all is not well – wake the tortoise up and support him in a warm vivarium/tortoise table for the rest of the winter