



Western New York Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Columbian Black and White Tegu **Latin name:** *Tupinambis teguixin*

Native to: Can be found throughout the Amazon Basin, especially Columbia

Size: Adults reach between 3 and 3.5 feet in length and usually weighs about 8 pounds.

General appearance: The common tegu has black and white stripes or spots with smooth scales and are similar in build to monitor species. Care should be taken to not confuse the Columbian black and white tegu with the Argentine black and white tegu (*T. merianae*). The Argentine tegu is larger and (reaching up to 4.5 feet in length) and often have a more distinctive striped pattern. Tegus should not be confused as monitors, which are strictly and old world species. Tegus fill the same ecological niche as monitors and are an example of convergent evolution.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: Adult tegus require a large enclosure. Generally the enclosure should be at least six feet in length and three feet in width. These lizards are primarily terrestrial and do not necessarily require a large vertical space to climb. A good general rule of thumb for an enclosure should be twice the length of the animal in length and the length of the animal in width. Tegus enjoy soaking and the occasional swim, so a large water dish that they can soak themselves should be provided. A hide box should also be provided at all times.

Temperature: The Columbian tegu is a tropical species and should be kept warm with a fairly stable temperature gradient. Ambient temperature should be approximately 85° F with a basking spot of 100° to 110° F. Nighttime temperatures should be about 75° F.

Heat/Light: Both UVA and UVB light is recommended for these lizards and can be provided with proper fluorescent bulbs. Heat can be provided with infrared heat bulbs, basking bulbs, or ceramic emitters. Newer Active UV bulbs now available can be used as well. These self-ballasted bulbs provide UVA and UVB light as well as heat.

Substrate: Tegus like to burrow and will appreciate a substrate that they can burrow through. Care should be used when selecting a substrate because some substrates may cause impaction, especially in juveniles. Substrates like newspaper and indoor-outdoor carpeting are easy to clean but do not allow for burrowing. Substrate like peat moss and/or vermiculite holds humidity very well and provides for burrowing but can be very messy. Under no circumstances should cedar be used, since it has been proved to be toxic. Pine shavings are also not recommended.

Environment: Because tegus come from the tropics, the enclosure should be kept in a humid environment. Ambient humidity should be at least 40% and greater is usually preferred. It may be necessary to block a portion of a screen top to achieve this level of humidity.

Diet: Tegus are natural scavengers as well as predators. As such they require a large and varied diet. Tegus can be fed rodents, small insects (such as crickets, mealworms, and others), canned high quality dog or cat food or even commercially prepared tegu diet. Ground turkey can also be used as well. Unlike monitors, tegus do require fruits as part of their diet. As much as half the diet for adult tegus can consist of fruits. Juvenile tegus generally will require more protein than adults. A good reptile multi-vitamin is also suggested to help keep the lizard healthy. As with all captive animals live or wild prey is not recommended due to the risk of injury and parasites to the animal. When feeding tegus it is not recommended to use your hands because they will often associate your hands with food and can become hazardous to handle. When feeding use tongs or a tray to avoid this problem.

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This document is for guidance only and should not be used as the sole source of information. New information is being developed daily. It is recommend that a concerted effort be made to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the animals of interest.



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Maintenance: The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily and disinfected weekly. If using indoor/outdoor carpeting it is recommended to have at least two sets for ease of cleaning. This will allow you to simply swap the clean carpeting for the soiled so you may clean it. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure and carpeting before placing the tegu back. The water dish should be emptied and cleaned daily as soaking tegus will often defecate in the water dish.

Other references or recommended reading:

- Sorin, Eric and Leslie, Hal. "Tegu Species Care Sheet." Updated 27 March 2000. Retrieved 18 January 2002 <<http://www.stanford.edu/~esorin/KarnivorHerpCare/teguas.html>>
- Temelli, Pinar. "Monitors & Tegus And Lizards." Retrieved 18 January 2002 <<http://www.thesnake.org/monitors.html>>
- Flank Jr., Lenny. "Captive Care of the Tegu Lizard." Retrieved 19 January 2002 <<http://geocities.com/RainForest/2421/tegu.html>>