



# Western New York Herpetological Society

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**Common Name:** Green Iguana

**Latin Name:** *Iguana iguana*

**Native to:** Central and South America. Imported iguanas are generally from Columbia, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, Mexico, and Surinam.

**Size Range:** Adult iguanas range in size from four to six feet in length.

**Lifespan:** If properly cared for, iguanas should live more than 20 years in captivity.

**Special Note:** While many people consider the green iguana a beginners pet, nothing is further from the truth. Iguanas require specialized care and management that is generally beyond the knowledge of most novices. It is because of this lack of knowledge that a majority of juvenile iguanas die prematurely. Iguana owners need to be aware of the specialized diet and housing requirements that the green iguana requires. If looking for a great beginner reptile or amphibian pet, consider a corn snake, milk snake, ball python, leopard gecko, bearded dragon, or pac man frog. All of these species are fun and a great way to begin in the hobby!

**General Appearance:** Iguanas are what most people think of when they think “lizard.” They have five toes on each foot. They possess a fleshy flap of skin under the chin called a dewlap. All iguanas have spines that run the length of the back. Contrary to popular belief, not all iguanas are green. Most juveniles are bright green, but as they age and grow they can range in color from a dull green to brown or even orange with striped tails.

## Housing Requirements:

**Enclosure:** The enclosure for an adult iguana is very large. The enclosure should be at least six feet tall, about 1½ to twice the length of the iguana, and 2/3 to one full length of the iguana wide. For a six foot adult iguana, this is an enclosure that is 9 to 12 feet long, four to six feet wide, and at least six feet tall. Sufficient branches and shelves for climbing and lounging should also be provided. To give you perspective on the size of the enclosure, most small bedrooms are only 9 feet wide. This is why many owners dedicate a separate room as their “iguana room.” Some owners also allow their iguanas to “free range” throughout the house. If you allow your iguana to live in its own room or free range, be sure to keep the area the iguana will frequent free of small objects that the iguana may accidentally ingest.

**Temperature:** Iguanas come from a tropical climate and need to be kept warm. Daytime temperatures should be 80° - 85° F with a basking spot of 90° - 95° F. There should be a range of temperatures offered to the iguana to allow it to thermoregulate itself. Nighttime temperatures should be 75° - 80° F. All temperatures should be verified with a thermometer regularly.

**Heat/Light:** Ultraviolet lighting providing UVA and UVB is required for proper calcium metabolism and skeletal development. Without the proper lighting you will become sick and die a very painful death. Proper lighting can be provided utilizing fluorescent tubes specially made for use by reptiles as well as mercury vapor bulbs that also provide some heat as well. Additional heat can be provided utilizing infrared ceramic emitters and incandescent basking bulbs. Hot rocks should never be used under any circumstance as they can severely burn your iguana.

**Substrates:** Iguanas will often tongue lick their surroundings. Because of this most particulate substrate (wood shavings, mulch, sand, or powder types) are not appropriate for most iguanas. Newspaper with non-toxic ink, butcher’s paper, paper towels, indoor/outdoor carpeting, or artificial grass all make excellent choices. If using indoor/outdoor carpeting or artificial grass please be sure that there are no dangling strings that could tangle in



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your iguana's nails. It's also recommended that you have multiple pieces so that you may replace the soiled pieces with the clean set and then clean and disinfect the current set to use for the next cleaning.

**Environment:** Iguanas come from a tropical climate and require a humidity level of 65% to 75%. To achieve this may require several mistings a day. Many people opt to purchase an automatic misting system instead.

**Diet:** Iguanas are strict herbivores. Many older literatures will suggest feeding animal protein or even cat food. While some wild iguanas may ingest the occasional insect while eating leaves, it is not a significant portion on their diet. Iguanas that are fed too much animal protein will develop health problems and will die prematurely. A well balanced iguana diet will consist of about 40% to 45% greens (this includes, but is not limited to collard greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens (with flowers), escarole, and/or water cress), 40% to 45% other vegetables (this includes but is not limited to green beans, orange-fleshed squashes (butternut, Kabocha), snap or snow peas, parsnip, asparagus, okra, alfalfa (mature, not sprouts), onions, mushrooms, bell peppers, sweet potato, zucchini, yellow squash, and/or carrots), 10% or less of fruits (including, but not limited to Figs (raw or dried), blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, grapes, mango, melon (cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon), papaya, banana, and/or apple), and less than 5% of other grains or commercial diets. Iguanas should never be rhubarb as it is toxic. Certain lettuces such as iceberg, romaine, and Boston butter lack sufficient nutrients and should only be fed occasionally. Acidic fruits (citrus, tomatoes, kiwi, pineapples, etc.) should also be only fed occasionally as well. Tofu can be occasionally offered as well for supplemental protein, though if too much is given it can lead to long term health issues. Wild plants and flowers are not recommended since they may be toxic to your iguana or may contain pesticides that could be toxic as well.

**Maintenance:** Cleanliness of the enclosure is essential. Waste products should be removed daily and the enclosure should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly. A 5% bleach solution provides and excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the solution from the enclosure before placing the iguana back in. Fresh water should also be offered at all times. Always wash your hands after handling your iguana or any of your iguana's cage accessories.

## Other References or Recommended Reading:

Iguanas require specialized care and we highly recommend that you do further reading on the proper care of your iguana. Please refer to the resources below as a starting point.

Hatfield III, James W. Green Iguana: The Ultimate Owner's Manual. *Second Edition*. Portland, OR. Dunthorpe Press. 2004

Kaplan, Melissa. "Green Iguana Care Collection." Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection. Updated March 25, 2005, Retrieved May 28, 2005 <<http://www.anapsid.org/iguana/>>

"Green Iguana Society Care Information." Green Iguana Society. 2005. Retrieved May 28, 2005. <<http://www.greenigsociety.org/careinfo.htm>>