

## **Mediterranean Spur Thighed Tortoise (Testudo Graeca)** **Care Sheet**

**Also known as 'Greek Tortoise' and 'Moorish Tortoise'**



### **Important information to know before taking on a Spur Thighed Tortoise**

- 🐢 Higher growth rate than some other species
- 🐢 Solitary animals- do not need to have other tortoises for company
- 🐢 Can grow to a fair size so need a large enclosure and space to move around
- 🐢 They can live reportedly up to 150 years

### **About the Spur Thighed Tortoise**

- 🐢 Comes from the Mediterranean region (North Africa, Spain and Balearic Islands)
- 🐢 Many sub-species exist
- 🐢 5 claws on front feet and 4 claws on hind feet
- 🐢 Can grow to 18-22cm in length.
- 🐢 Adult males have long thick tails with a hook at the end, and a concave plastron, in most cases.
- 🐢 Females have short stubby tails (occasionally they have a hook) and a flat plastron, in most cases.

### **The law**

- 🐢 Greek Spur Thigh tortoises are protected by Appendix I of CITES (Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species), and Annex A.
- 🐢 For sale, exchange or barter, a license and CITES paperwork is required, and microchipping if above minimum length.
  - Please chat to your reptile-savvy veterinarian re microchipping your tortoise.

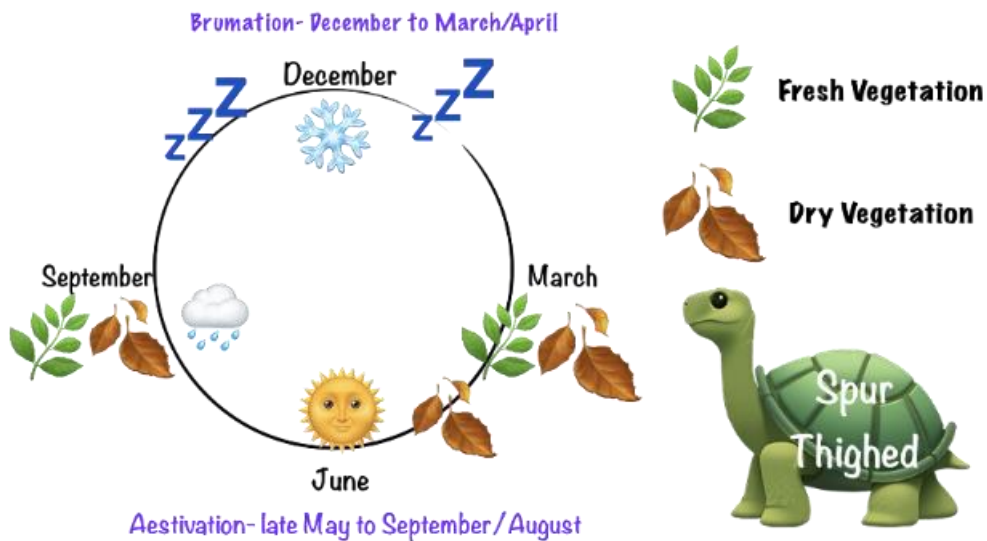


Photo courtesy of Jemma Sulsh BVSc Cert AVP MRCVS

## How to care for your Spur Thighed Tortoise

### HEATING:

- The basking area should be around 32-34 °C
- a 100W or higher halogen or incandescent bulb, that is thermostatically controlled, would be best for 12 hours a day (except around Brumation- see notes)
- Bulb wattage requirement is dependent on environment being covered, so adapt to your specific environment, and check basking spot-temperatures regularly.
- The bulb should be mounted at least 30cm away from the top of the tortoise's shell.
- The cool end and ambient room temperature should be 22-24 °C.
- Overnight temperatures can be allowed to go down
  - In the wild temperatures can drop significantly, however in captivity we currently do not recommend temperatures dropping below approximately 16 °C.
  - A ceramic heat bulb or a radiant heat panel, connected to a dimming/pulse-proportional thermostat, can help. Cages should be considered around the bulbs.
- Humidity should be 70% for babies and juveniles.
- We do not recommend heat mats or pads, or heat rocks. This is due to poor heat production and risk of burns from these sources.

### ULTRAVIOLET LIGHTING:

- UV light from the sun is best but this is not consistent in the UK- an alternative UV light source should be provided
  - UVB strip bulbs – combination or point bulbs provide inadequate coverage and UVB provision other than directly underneath them.  
Bulbs should be the correct power and percentage for your Spur Thighed, please check the brand specific recommendations, or ask us for help!
  - Change regularly- check with brand of bulb

- Or measure with an appropriate solar meter
- The visual light can outlast the UVB provision.
- Provide for 12 hours a day (except around Brumation- see notes)

#### EXTRA CARE:

- Brumation:
  - Tortoises are ectothermic (cold-blooded). They don't 'hibernate' like mammals but instead have a period of dormancy over the colder months. Unlike mammals- it is not a true state of sleep, but a rest time to reduce burning of calories.
  - The first trigger for this is a drop in temperature overnight.
  - This species usually starts wind down in November/December and will wake up March/ April. However, our prolonged winters in the UK can lead to excessive hibernation lengths in this species.
  - See Brumation information sheet for more details
- Aestivating:
  - This is a summer dormancy when the weather is too hot and the food is sparse.
  - Usually around May to August/September time.
  - Activity is reduced.

#### HOUSING/ENCLOSURE:

- Avoid vivariums, unless specific indications, as its difficult to get conditions correct and they often have poor ventilation
- Glass enclosures are very stressful for tortoises
- Tortoise tables work well (6ft x 4ft is good for juvenile/ adults) babies need a smaller enclosure so they don't get overwhelmed
  - This should be adjusted for tortoise size
- They should not be kept outside all year round in the UK, but an outside enclosure would be beneficial in the warmer parts of the year.
  - Polytunnels or cold frames can work well: <https://www.tortoisetrust.com/post/the-climate-frame-terrarium-updated>
  - They should be protected from predators
  - UVB and heating provisions are still required.
- They love to dig and burrow so ideally provide a 30cm pit- the bottom filled with gravel to allow good drainage and the top a fine sandy soil for burrowing
- Provide areas to climb (mounds), rocks/ bits of wood, areas to dig in and hides- can provide straw beds to borrow into.
- Provide plants to graze from ([www.tortoisetrust.com](http://www.tortoisetrust.com)):
  - Spirea
  - Hosta
  - Knockout rose
  - Hibiscus
  - Fountain grass
  - Maiden grass

- Sedum
- Yarrow
- Mediterranean heather
- A fine sand/ soil mix will mimic their natural substrate best- but they can eat sand and get possible impactions, particularly if the mix is wrong.
  - Avoid any chemically treated or fertilised soils/sands.
  - Sieve any mixes before introducing, to check no foreign bodies are in the mix.
- A mulch type top layer is important for young Spur Thighed tortoises as they need high humidity (70%) to help growth. A mist spray can be used as well. Pyramiding of the shell can be linked to dehydration/ inadequate humidity levels.

#### FEEDING:

- High fibre, low protein, no carbohydrates or fruit
- Diets should be high fibre, low protein, no carbohydrates or fruit
- Pelleted diets are available, however often are highly calorific, so fresher forage is preferable
- AGROBS/ Pre-Alpin Testudo range: <https://www.agrobs.de/en/tortoises/> (hydrate them)
- Mazuri Tortoise diet ([www.mazuri.com](http://www.mazuri.com)) (hydrate them)
- Highly cyclic in the wild- more lush vegetation in the spring and more dry vegetation in the summer, like grass hay
  - Cyclic diet requirements due to seasonal fluctuations in the wild
  - After a short Brumation they emerge in early spring (end of March)
  - A mix of fresh greens and dried vegetation should be offered
  - As the temperature increases towards summer the vegetation becomes drier
  - Around July time there is little food and the temperature is hot- aestivation occurs
  - Early August/ September the rains come and activity resumes with more fresh vegetation
  - As the temperature starts to drop a short Brumation begins in December
  - Timing and duration of feeding day-to-day depends on how they can maintain body temperature. For example, they may feed in the morning and again in the evening if it's very hot in the middle of the day, or not feed until lunch time once the day has warmed up
- Wider variation to allow self-selection to mimic more natural grazing
- Typically consume 1-4% of their body weight in food/ day
- Check out [www.thetortoisetable.org.uk](http://www.thetortoisetable.org.uk) for feeding suggestions and traffic-light system of what to feed and when
- Plant tortoise seed mixes can help make foraging easier
- Vitamin and mineral supplements
  - Tortoises need calcium sources and Vitamin D in their diet
  - You can add chalk blocks/ cuttle fish bones to the enclosure, however this provides only calcium
  - Vetarks Nutrobal (or similar) provides Vitamin D and Calcium, it should be alternated with a purely calcium mix (e.g. Calcidust) in a healthy individual.
  - Vitamin A should be available in many leafy green diets/appropriate forage. Therefore, supplementation is usually only indicated if inadequate levels in the diet available.

- Feeding off a tile/ slate will reduce any substrate ingestion
- A large/ shallow dish that the tortoise can drink from is important- ideally an adult tortoise can bathe itself as well
- 15 minute soaks 3-4 x week to help with hydration

## HEALTH:

Tortoises are susceptible to a variety of illnesses which will need the advice of a veterinary surgeon, Runny nose, mouth rot and parasite infestation are infectious and require isolation.

1. Discharge from the nostrils and watery eyes can be due to rhinitis, sinusitis or runny nose syndrome. The symptoms may progress from upper respiratory tract disease to pneumonia in the lungs. Can be related to dietary deficiencies, and/or bacterial and viral diseases.
  2. Stomatitis (often referred to as mouth rot) is often seen post brumation. It appears as a general inflammation or caseous (cheesy) material attached to the tongue, mouth and throat. The infectious agents behind this can be varied, therefore bringing your tortoise to the vet is of paramount importance.
  3. Osteodystrophy (soft shell) can result from a combination of calcium deficiency, Vitamin D deficiency, incorrect lighting and excessive protein in the diet.
  4. Diarrhoea is a sign of ill health, husbandry problems, a dietary imbalance or parasites. Check for undigested food, mucus or worms in faeces.
  5. Blindness or disorientation after hibernation can be caused by frost damage. The tortoise shuffles in circles and does not feed.
  6. Predator-related injuries – very common in outdoor housed tortoise, secondary to rat bites, equally it isn't uncommon for dogs to mistake tortoises for toys and cause significant damage.
- Yearly check-ups by your vet are advisable (can do worm counts at this time), check-ups every 6 months are even better.
  - Keep a record of date and weight.