

Hibernation Advice for Tortoises

Breeds to Hibernate

Not all breeds hibernate,

Breeds that do are:

- Horsfield
- Hermanns
- Marginated
- Spur Thighed

Things to remember

- 1) In order to survive in good condition, tortoises need to have built up sufficient reserves of body fat.
- 2) As the day length shortens and the temperature starts to drop they will naturally start to get ready.
- 3) Without fat and water, tortoises die of starvation or dehydration whilst hibernating.

Wind Down Period

4 weeks – it takes a month for food to clear through the guts

Week 1: (ideally should be beginning of November)

- Don't feed
- Bathe tortoise daily
- 12 hours heat and UV light

Week 2:

- Don't feed
- Bathe daily
- 8 hours heat & UV light
- Monitor faeces production

Week 3:

- Don't feed
- Bathe daily
- 4 hours heat and UV light

Week 4:

- Don't feed
- Bathe daily
- Move into a cold, frost free room
- If urates or faeces produced, delayed hibernation

Practical Points

Place in a ventilated Tupperware box

Provide substrate – sterile soil (not hay because of fungal spores)

Monitor temperature between (4-6°C)

Warning: If the temperature drops to 0°C or below then they risk frost bite

If the temperature rises above 10°C then they will come out of hibernation.

The ideal location for hibernation is the middle shelf of a fridge that doesn't get regularly opened where the temperature can be maintained between 4-6°C.

A shed, garage or loft risk temperature fluctuations that can lead to frost bite or yo-yoing of temperature changes above and below 10°C that bring them in and out of hibernation which causes a drain on energy reserves.

Hibernation procedure

- Don't hibernate for more than 12 weeks (greater than 12 weeks the immune system has completely shut down).
- Weigh weekly
- Wake up if they lose more than 10% body weight since the start
- Wake up if they lose more than 1% body weight in the first month
- Wake up if they pass urates or faeces.
- Wake up if they naturally wake up.

Post Hibernation Care

- Move to a dimly lit warm room
- After a few hours place under a basking light
- Once awake and lifting head then bathe at least once daily for 20 minutes (more frequently is better)
- Should pass urates within 24hrs
- Once they have passed urates then offer them food
- Normally should eat within 1-2 days
- See a vet if not eaten for > 7 days.