

## Box & Wood Turtles

### *Terrapene, Cuora, Rhinoclemmys* species

**CAGING:** An ordinary aquarium will do as housing for turtles. The aquarium should be at least three times as long as the turtle. These turtles can be aggressive, and should be kept one per tank; if keeping more than one turtle per tank is necessary, allow at least 5 times each turtle's area (5 x length of turtle x width of turtle) for each additional turtle. These are minimum requirements; the larger the cage, the happier the turtle. Breeder cages may be more practical in terms of cost and shape. Provision must be made for a water tray in which your turtle can sit and soak. The water level should not be deeper than the turtle's head. Astroturf or newspaper makes good liner for the cage. Decorations such as rocks and plants may be used, but avoid rough surfaces which can abrade the turtle's shell, leading to infection.

All turtles must have natural sunlight or an artificial equivalent, such as a Vita-Lite™. They require the ultraviolet rays such sources produce in order to metabolize vitamins. The light should be hung no more than 12 inches above the dry platform, with no glass or plastic between the light and the tank. Ordinary glass and plastic block the ultraviolet light. The light should be on at least 2 hours each day.

**WATER:** The water tray must be cleaned frequently, usually daily. These turtles tend to defecate in the water.

**TEMPERATURE:** These turtles require moderate temperatures. The cage should be heated to 72 to 82 degrees F by an under-cage heating pad or overhead lights. The dry portion should have a spot light hung above it to provide a warmer (85-90 degrees F) basking spot during the day. If your turtle is inactive, it's too cold.

**FOOD:** Wood and Box turtles are omnivorous. Earthworms, crickets, raw meat, fruits such as bananas, tomatoes, pears, and strawberries, and vegetables such as corn, spinach, mushrooms, and broccoli are all good foods. Vary the diet frequently, and do not allow the turtle to become fixated on one type of food. It is highly recommended that you supplement the food with vitamin and calcium additives, which are available commercially.

**HEALTH:** Cages must be kept clean. Anti-bacterial cleaning solutions are recommended. One ounce of bleach in ten ounces of water is one such solution. Rinse the cage thoroughly with clean water after using any solution. Don't use Lysol, Lestoil or other such oil-based cleaners; they are deadly to reptiles.

**HANDLING:** Most turtles don't mind being handled, once in a while. Most will simply pull their heads in and flail their legs. Some will bite. In any case, it is not good to handle them too often, as the stress can lead to the turtle becoming ill. Be careful not to drop them; a cracked shell can cause deadly infections. Always wash your hands after handling your turtle, before touching anything else (especially food or your face). This will prevent any chance of your becoming ill due to bacteria carried by the turtle.

This Care Sheet was originally written by New England Herpetological Society. It can be found at [www.neherp.com](http://www.neherp.com) or [www.AnimalCityInc.com](http://www.AnimalCityInc.com)

