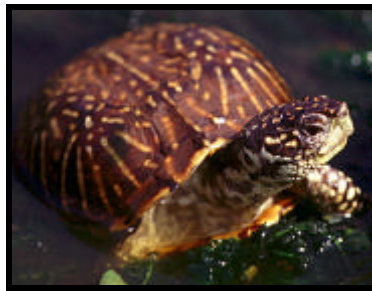


Ornate box turtles

Ornate box turtles perish by the thousand every year as a result of trade collecting for the pet market. The truth is, a more unsuitable turtle to keep as a pet can hardly be imagined. This species has extremely specialized needs, both in terms of environment and diet. They also stress very easily, and rapidly 'crash' due to parasitic and bacterial infections. Many more are injured during the collection and shipping process itself. The Tortoise Trust does not support any commercial collecting of wild box turtles, but the trade in Ornate box turtles is particularly indefensible. We urge all responsible stores to withdraw from this aspect of the trade, and instead to provide alternate, more suitable species, as pets, preferably of captive-bred origin.



Ornate box turtle:
Terrapene ornata ornata



Ornate box turtles are among the most sensitive and difficult of North American species to maintain successfully. **We do not recommend this species for beginners.** They inhabit a variety of environments, from grassy plains to damp forest floors. They make extensive use of burrows and microclimates. Glass aquarium tanks are categorically not appropriate for this species. They do best in carefully landscaped outdoor enclosures, or in large, indoor terraria with adequate substrate depth. For a substrate, we recommend light peat-based potting compost mixed with damp sphagnum moss. This should be at least 3-4" (75-100 mm) deep. It is imperative that Ornate box turtles are not allowed to become dehydrated - so dry tanks with excessive heat are a major source of problems. Ensure that box turtle habitats are provided with plenty of shade, have a shallow 'soaking' tray of fresh, clean water permanently available, and that temperatures are maintained from 80-85 °F in one area to approximately 70 °F in another. **On no account over-heat or allow dehydration to occur.** Spray the area regularly and ensure that the substrate retains adequate humidity at all times. Environmental problems usually manifest as swollen and infected eyes, ear abscesses and kidney diseases. As virtually all box turtles sold are wild-caught, parasitic diseases are also very common. Look out for Bot fly larvae infections, flagellate infestations and nematodes (intestinal 'worms'). All will require treatment from a specialist veterinarian. Ornate box turtles are highly carnivorous. Provide calcium-dusted crickets, mealworms, waxworms and earthworms on a regular basis. Pinkie mice are also very important. Over-ripe fruits and green-leaf salads are also essential.

- From North America
- Can hibernate if healthy under appropriate conditions
- Omnivorous, with high live food requirement
- Extremely sensitive to incorrect environments
- Requires high humidity substrate for burrowing
- Requires extensive outdoor and indoor accommodation
- Regular soaking or constant access to water recommended

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