



## Husbandry Handbook

# AMERICAN MUD & MUSK TURTLES

(Genus: Kinosternon and Sternotherus)

### Small but Bitey!

Mud and Musk turtles are small aquatic turtles that spend their time in the mud at the bottom of ponds or stagnant bodies of water. These small turtles usually have large heads that they use to ambush and grab prey as it walks or swims by. With incredible jaw strength they are able to capture insects, fish, worms, frogs, and any other aquatic animal that gets close enough to their powerful jaws. Mud turtles get their namesake because they spend much of their time in the mud, but musk turtles get their name from a musky smell they emit from glands when threatened. Due to their more stagnant nature, small adult size, and easy habitat requirements, these are amazing and quirky turtles to keep as pets.

### Habitat

Mud and Musk Turtles are found in slow or still freshwater habitats. These turtles prefer permanent bodies of water rather than flood zones or vernal ponds. Many enthusiasts find these turtles throughout the east and southern portion of the United States, but they can be found north up into Wisconsin. Specific ranges vary depending on the species. Habitats vary drastically from one end of their range to the other, but they inhabit the same niches no matter where they are found. They are rather aquatic and prefer water that has gradients of depth. Provide them with a proper basking spot, but don't be concerned if they don't use it very often.

### Housing

While these turtles start out the size of a ping pong ball, they can reach sizes of 4-6" depending on the species and will require large aquatic environments as adults despite their small stature due to their activity. For turtles 4-6", an Aqueon® 40BR aquarium or larger is necessary to provide the space needed for your turtle. These turtles spend very little time on land and usually only come out of the water to bask under their lights. Provide them a dry basking site out of the water to allow these turtles to fully dry off and warm up. This will keep your pet turtle's skin and shell healthier. A unique and realistic looking option for a basking site is the Zilla® Log Landing and Zilla® Turtle Trunk. The majority of the turtle's environment is water and turtles produce a lot of waste, so keeping it clean can be a challenge. Mechanical and chemical filtration is necessary. Filters such as the Zilla® Basking Platform Filters and the Zilla® Aquatic Reptile Internal Filter make great options for volumes of water up to 40 gallons, but over that you'll need an Aqueon® QuietFlow® Canister Filter. Make sure to do a 50% water change every month to remove waste and add Zilla® Water Conditioner to the new water. Depending on the filtration, size of the enclosure, and your pet, you may need to change the water more frequently. Adding a Zilla® Fresh Air Screen Cover to prevent your turtle from escaping is essential for maintaining your pet's safety. They are much better climbers than you think and you don't want the household cat to play in the water either!

### Temperature and Lighting

Although Mud and Musk Turtles are aquatic, spending most of their time in the water, they still require a thermal gradient in the air temperature. In the wild, things like tree limbs and leaves overhead create different temperature areas to bask in based on shadows. To replicate that in the terrarium, create a heated basking site on one end, and other areas to get out of the water throughout the habitat. These turtles need temperatures approximately 85°-95°F to bask under with species from southern regions requiring higher temperatures, and a gradient down to 75°F on the cool end. This can be created with Zilla® Incandescent Spot Bulbs or Zilla® Mini 25W or 50W Halogen Bulbs. It is important to monitor your pet's enclosure temperatures using a Zilla® Digital Thermometer. An incredibly important and too often forgotten lighting need is UVA and UVB. Make sure to provide access to UVA and UVB over the basking platforms using any Zilla® Fluorescent Tropical 25 UVA/UVB Bulb. For more information on UV lighting, read "Understanding UVA, UVB, and UVC Reptile Lighting."

### Feeding and Diet

In the wild these Mud and Musk Turtles are omnivores and scavengers eating insects, fish, worms, crayfish, and occasionally plant matter. One of the easiest things about keeping a turtle as a pet is feeding them. Not only is it fun to interact with them during feeding, but Zilla® Fortified Aquatic Turtle Food makes keeping food on hand and feeding easy. Only feed your turtle as many pellets as it can eat in 15 minutes. If you're able to, clear out any uneaten food after that time. You can also offer your turtle fresh water fish that has been frozen-thawed and earth worms.

### Handling

Handling Mud and Musk Turtles is not advised unless necessary. While they make incredible pets, they can kick, attempt to bite, and scratch a lot when pulled out of the water. Turtles do not understand that we are not giant predators and will often act defensively when they are removed from the water. Although they are great pets and full of life, they are best left in their enclosures.

***Always be sure to wash your hands after handling or cleaning the enclosure of any animal.***

