



## Husbandry Handbook

# SLIDER TURTLE

(*Trachemys scripta ssp.*)

### North America's Most Common Turtles

Slider turtles are found commonly throughout the southern half of the United States and into Central America. The multiple subspecies of sliders range from medium to large sized turtles. Sliders are often found basking on logs and rocks around lakes, ponds, and other stagnant bodies of water. They get their name, "slider" from their habit of sliding off of their basking spot into the water to escape predators. The three most common subspecies are the Red Eared Slider, Cumberland Slider, and Yellow-Bellied Slider. The shell and skin of these turtles range from green and brown to gray with highlights and plastrons that are yellow. These turtles have become incredibly popular in the United States due to the ease of caring for a species that lives in a similar climate where most people live. Make sure to keep in mind that these turtles are a long-lived pet with a lifespan of up to 40 years!

### Habitat

Sliders are found in Florida through Texas and into Central America. 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 aquatic to semi-aquatic and can be found in many types of permanent bodies of water such as lakes, swamps, ponds, rivers, and streams. Unfortunately, due to the bad decisions of many keepers who release their unwanted pets into lakes and ponds all over the world, these turtles have become invasive in many countries where they should never have been. Due to how quickly they outcompete the native species, they have caused large problems for many species, especially those that are threatened or endangered.

Should you end up in a situation where you need to rehome your pet, contact your local Humane Society, Reptile Rescue, or Herpetological Society. You can find more information at <https://www.habitattitude.net/>.

### Housing

While these turtles start out small, they can reach sizes up to 16" and will require large aquatic environments as adults. For turtles 4-8", an Aqueon® 40BR aquarium or larger is necessary to provide the space needed for your turtle. Once larger than 8", an Aqueon® 180 Gallon aquarium or larger is required. 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 sliders 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 sites to get out of the water throughout the habitat. These turtles need temperatures approximately 85°F-95°F to bask, and a gradient down to 75°F on the cool end. This can be created with Zilla® Incandescent Spot Bulbs or Zilla® Mini Halogen Bulbs. It is important to monitor your pet's enclosure temperatures. An incredibly important and too often forgotten lighting needed is UVA/UVB. Make sure to provide access to UVA/UVB on the basking platforms using any Zilla® Fluorescent UVA/UVB bulb. For more information on UV lighting, read "Understanding UVA, UVB, and UVC Reptile Lighting."

### Feeding and Diet

In the wild these turtles are omnivores and scavengers eating plant matter, insects, fish, and worms. 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.

### Handling

It's not advised to hold turtles unless necessary. While they make incredible pets, they can kick and scratch a lot when pulled out of the water. Water can also be home to many different bacteria including Salmonella.

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

