



exotis

Hibernation in the tortoise

Contributors: Siuna Ann Reid, Kirsty Dewhurst



Hibernation in the tortoise

Hibernation is a way of escaping weather or conditions that are too poor to live in. Some tortoises hibernate to avoid very hot weather and others hibernate to escape very cold weather. Many African tortoises do not hibernate so once again, it is important to understand the type of tortoise you have bought and research your species.

How do I prepare for hibernation?

Before your first hibernation, it is important to take your tortoise to a veterinarian for a pre-hibernation health check, to make sure that he or she is heavy enough and in good health in order to survive the hibernation period.

About a month before hibernation the tortoise should be gradually cooled to temperatures of around 10°C/50°F. Once he has stopped eating and drinking and he is no longer passing feces or urine, he can be placed into hibernation.

How long do tortoises hibernate for?

Traditionally tortoises in the UK hibernate from October to February. They were often placed in well insulated boxes in a garage or an attic where the temperatures were constant.

It is no longer necessary for your tortoise to hibernate for 5 months of the year. Hibernation can be controlled using specially ventilated refrigerators. The length of time can be chosen. This process helps to slow growth and allows the females to mature.

Once the temperature falls below 10°C/50°F the heart rate and breathing slows down to just a few beats per minute. This means that the tortoise will then use the fat stored in his body during hibernation.

What happens when my tortoise comes out of hibernation?

Once the hibernation period has ended the tortoise will need to be gradually warmed until he reaches his preferred body temperature. It's important to learn your tortoise's normal activity level so that at these times you can spot if he is not getting back to his normal self.

Food and water should be offered, and he should also have plenty of warm baths. Once he has started eating and passing urine and feces he should return to normal.

Hibernation makes huge demands on the body and many vitamins are used up. Check your tortoise for any signs of ill health and if he looks unwell or doesn't return to his normal activity level then it is really important to take him to see a veterinarian.

Thank you for reading our Vetlexicon Exotis content



Vetlexicon is the ultimate clinical information resource for small and large animal veterinarians and practices. It provides evidence-based point-of-care information, thousands of articles, images, videos and sounds, hundreds of surgical and diagnostic techniques, a vast library of owner factsheets and much more. All the information is designed to optimize your individual and practice confidence and naturally support your clinical protocols.

To view more Vetlexicon content, please visit

www.vetstream.com/treat

[SIGN UP NOW!](#)

For more information contact Vetstream at subscriptions@vetstream.com
or call +44 (0)1223 895818