

Blue-tongued Skink *Tiliqua scincoides*

Skinks are a widespread family of lizards found around the globe in both temperate and tropical areas. Over 1,200 species are known to science, but few are as attractive or as easy to keep or breed as the magnificent Blue-tongue.

must know

As the name suggests, these lizards have a lovely big blue tongue. If threatened, this can be flattened and rippled inside an open mouth which, accompanied by a hiss, acts as an effective deterrent to would-be predators.

Appearance and habitat

These stocky 50cm (20in) lizards have overlapping scales and can be found on the ground in Australia and Tasmania where they live amongst leaf litter, consuming invertebrates and snails as well as fruit – many live underground. New species of skink are still being discovered, but they all have certain characteristics in common. Skinks are noted for their long flattened, shiny bodies and degenerate or reduced limbs – some are completely limbless while other types have very small and very weak legs.

Most skinks are omnivorous and, including the Blue-tongue, give birth to live young, rather than lay eggs. They may live for 10–15 years. Juvenile skinks are particularly vulnerable to introduced predators, such as cats in Australia, and are diminishing in numbers right across their range.

Creating the right environment

Blue-tongued Skinks should be kept singly as a rule as they can be very aggressive towards one another. A dry, woodland type of habitat is ideal for this totally terrestrial species. The ground can be covered in cork logs for retreats and decorated for visual effect with leaf litter, twigs and mossy rocks. Remember that these lizards root around under ground debris

looking for food, and therefore a delicately planted vivarium would be quickly ruined.

A vivarium for a single skink should measure at least 120 x 30 x 30cm (48 x 12 x 12in) with a daytime temperature gradient of 25–35°C (77–95°F), falling at night to 18–20°C (65–68°F). The combination of a heater pad at one end and a thermostatically-controlled spotlight, wired up to a timer switch, will warm the tank and create a daytime basking area. Timing the light to switch off during the evening would automatically reduce the temperature. Full spectrum lighting is generally recommended for successful long-term care and breeding, but any exposure to natural sunlight outside is a good thing. Many people keep this species in outdoor enclosures when it is warm enough, but ensure they cannot escape and are safe from predators.

Handling

The temperament of lizards can vary, just like people, but for many years the Blue-tongue Lizard has been considered a good choice for close contact. They are normally very tolerant of handling and quite enjoy a stroke or scratch. Their small claws may feel sharp on younger hands and they always need to feel supported under their body and legs.

Feeding

My Blue-tongued Skinks enjoy variations of the diet that is described below, but they can easily become obese, so take care not to feed them every day.



Young captive bred Blue-tongues are normally acquired when they are about a couple of months old. With regular handling, they can become very tame.

must know

The skin of lizards varies enormously but is based upon the 'scale' in all species. Blue-tongued Skinks have tough, almost armoured, scales for rummaging in the Australian bush. Scales are made of keratin, a fibrous structural protein, which is also a component of nails, hair, horns and feathers.