

## Russian Tortoise

Testudo horsfieldii, Afghan Tortoise, Central Asian Tortoise, Steppe Tortoise

Four Clawed Tortoise



A tough personable tortoise very adaptive not needing high humidity.

**Size** 5–10-inch Males tend to be smaller than females, mine are around 5 inches straight carapace length (SCL).

**Natural range** Russia, Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, they live in extreme conditions and may only be active for 3 months of the year in the wild, the rest of the year they would hibernate at high elevations up to 7000ft. In captivity they are happy with either a short hibernation or equally happy without too.

**Diet** Russian tortoises eat a Herbivorous Diet- (please see the Herbivorous diet sheet) and enjoy outdoor time in the summer with access to varied grazing area.

**Indoor Enclosure** These tortoises are active and will happily use all their space in a tortoise table set up Provide a few hides to make them feel secure and they prefer a well-lit environment as it stimulates their activity levels. Provide heat and high output UV lighting and add additional regular floodlights or halogen bulbs if extra light is needed. Provide a 12-hr photo period. Although they are a more arid species remember to offer moisture in hide areas, we use moistened sphagnum moss and provide constant access to clean water which they do use.

**Substrate** We use a base layer of fine coconut coir and top it off with either bark mulch or coarse coconut coir. Our nest area contains a deep sandy soil mix. Russians are excellent at burrowing so feel free to add a deeper layer of substrate so that they can dig down and hide.

**Temperatures** Provide a basking spot of 90-95F and a low end of low 70's F but a drop down to 60F is still acceptable overnight and natural for them.

**Outdoor Enclosure** *Be aware that they are excellent excavators* so be mindful of this when designing a safe outdoor enclosure as they can dig down into the ground a few feet deep. We dug the perimeter wire below the ground level, turning it inwards when constructing our enclosure to help prevent them digging out. We also added a mesh roof to protect from wildlife such as raccoons, birds of prey etc.

Try growing some edible plants (see suggestions in the diet sheets) in their outdoor set ups and provide shelters so that they can shelter from the sun on hot days. If you do not have access to a garden even a few minutes a few times a week supervised outdoors in the sunshine will be beneficial to your tortoise.

**Behaviour** Russians are tough hardy characters and rarely shy. I have seen them described as sulcattas in a small package. They are bold and curious and make great pets even for caring children, with adult supervision. Two males will often fight, and they can damage each other and worse, girls can get along, but it is not guaranteed. Both male and female Russian tortoises will be happy kept as an individual pet tortoise.



*Written by Louise Bonser*

**Prairie Hills Tortoises**