

Diets for Tortoises



In the wild a tortoise's natural diet is obviously nutritionally superior. They walk miles a day grazing on small amounts of a huge variety of native plants. A herbivore tortoise diet is typically high in calcium, fibre and low in phosphorous and protein. It is difficult to match this level of nutrition in captivity, especially in a Northern climate.

However, we can try our best at providing a varied diet often dictated by seasonal availability and sometimes with the help of some commercial foods and added vitamins and minerals. We can also choose to dry natural foods in summer to prepare for winter. There are also many houseplants and annuals that can be grown indoors year-round and this gives us more choices

The following diet lists are based on our experience and what has worked for us over decades of tortoise keeping. Whilst not perfect in winter we do find summer to be much easier given the natural foods growing even in our truly short growing season. There are extensive lists of plants on the internet and we would encourage you to research as many of them as you can. These include weeds, grasses, garden plants, house plants vegetables and fruits. Variety is important so try to include as many options as you can. We hope our lists will get you started on the huge variety of good foods we can feed to tortoises.

Here at Prairie Hills Tortoises, we do choose to use some dry complete foods as part of our tortoise's diet throughout the year it is particularly useful in Winter. Its good to have them on hand when other foods are limited, also the babies are given some and when they move on to their new homes, they have a familiar food that we know they enjoy. We use the regular Mazuri Tortoise diet, The Mazuri LS version with more fibre plus Zoo Med Grassland and Forest foods.

We also offer free feed calcium carbonate also known as Limestone flour (no vitamin D) and it is one of the best forms of calcium for absorption in tortoises. Its very inexpensive too from agricultural feed stores We feel we do not need to sprinkle it on all the foods as it is possible to give too much so having a bowl of the powder in all set ups allow the tortoise to take it as and when they feel they need it. In the winter we do occasionally (weekly) sprinkle their foods with small amounts of the calcium plus vitamin D as they are not getting the benefit of the suns UVB. Cuttle bone is always available too which is helpful too in keeping their beaks trimmed. Making calcium blocks is easy-combine calcium carbonate powder to water until thick and well mixed then pour into muffin tins and allow to set hard, this can take a few days.