

Map Turtles

Author: James Thorburn



Map turtles are generally available throughout the UK, with False and Mississippi being the most common sub-species. Capable of living for more than 25 years, males can reach up to 6" (depending on sub-species) with females considerably larger, potentially exceeding 11" shell length. Sexable at around 3" inches, males possess much larger tails and longer front claws.

As a guide, when choosing a tank, ensure it can hold a minimum of 40 litres of water per an inch of shell length for the largest turtle, plus 20 Litres per an inch for each additional turtle. Bear in mind that this is water amount and not just tank size, and unless you construct an above tank basking area you will not be able to fill tanks to the brim. For hatchlings it's a good idea to plan for plenty of growth. This will not only allow for adequate swimming space but help maintain water quality, which is especially important with Maps as they can be susceptible to illness. An external filter rated for at least 2-3x the amount of water is required, and it is important perform regular partial water changes.

No substrate is needed, but a single layer of large smooth pebbles or slate can be used. Avoid gravel as it can be swallowed and become stuck in the turtles digestive system, and sand because it can cause problems with filters. All but the very smallest specimens are great swimmers and thrive in deep water as long as there are plenty of places to rest just below the surface with its head above water. Water temperature for hatchlings should be 25-27C, turtles over 2" 22-24C, and standard room temperature (around 20C) being fine for older juveniles and adults.

It is essential to provide a dry basking area that allows them to completely leave the water, absorb UVB rays, and warm up in temperatures of 30-35C for 10-14 hours a day. A floating turtle dock, or large piece of cork bark that can be secured in place are ideal to create this area. A standard household spot bulb can be used as the basking lamp, plus a UVB bulb or tube with a minimum output of 5.0% (ideally 8.0 or 10.0%) must also be situated above the basking site. For larger tanks Mercury Vapour Bulbs (MVB) are great, as at correct distance they emit both suitable heat and strong UVB levels. Even if they are being kept without a male, adult females should additionally have access to a sandy area for egg laying.

A good quality pellet (like ReptoMin) is best for making up the base of a map's diet, feeding as much as would fit into their head if it were hollow once a day until about 6 months old, then slowly reducing until you are feeding pellets just once or twice a week by 4 or 5 years old. Greens such as kale and dandelion leaves (ensure they haven't come into contact with harmful chemicals) also make up a key part of their diet. These should be placed in the water and left for 24-48 hours so turtles can graze, or aquatic plants such as duckweed also work well. Treats such as freshwater shrimp, small fish, or mealworms (fed on nutrient rich food) can be offered once every one or two weeks instead of pellets. For extra calcium cuttlebone should have the hard backing removed and be broken into more manageable pieces before being placed in the water.

Much like any other turtles, handling is not recommended unless absolutely necessary, as this will likely cause stress and potentially transfer dangerous bacteria such as salmonella. Always wash your hands thoroughly with anti-bacterial soap or use sanitizing gel after coming into contact with your pet or anything in its enclosure.