

Musk Turtles

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The Musk turtle family are a North American group of turtles that are now becoming a regular in the UK pet shops. They are different from the usual turtles on offer in that they are walkers rather than swimmers and remain relatively small when compared to sliders and cooters. They also have glands that can emit a powerful smell when they are scared, hence their nick name "Stinkpots". They can be rather fragile to start with as babies but once they reach a SCL of around 1" they become a hardy species. In the wild, they live in slow running rivers and still waterways that are overgrown with weed. The three species that appear in our pet shops are...

Common Musk (*Sternotherus odoratus*) - Max Size 4 - 5"

Razorback Musk (*Sternotherus carinatus*) - Max Size 4 - 5.5"

Loggerhead Musk (*Sternotherus minor*) - Max Size 4 - 5"

All the Musk family require similar conditions, however the care of juveniles compared to adults is different.

Juveniles (under 1" SCL) require a water temperature of 80 degrees, a basking area should be offered at 90 degrees however do not be surprised if it is not used. Water depth should be no deeper than 4" with plenty of real or artificial weed and plenty to climb on like bog wood or rocks, play sand makes a good substrate. Filtration can be a challenge because of water depth and the flow rate; I have found the best thing is a Fluval 1 internal filter mounted flat on the floor of the tank so the flow goes up instead of swilling around the tank. They are almost entirely carnivorous and will eat bloodworm, shrimp, chopped beef heart, chopped fish, and daphnia. They will eventually take pellets but these need to be chopped to be small enough for them to manage. The important thing to get right is the water temperature and a varied diet.

Adults can be kept in deeper water, anything up to 2 feet, but they will still require being able to climb from the bottom to the surface and also a resting area near the surface is needed where they can reach the surface by extending their necks. The water temperature can be lowered to 74 degrees (Fahrenheit) and again a basking area should be offered but will probably not be used. Adult musks are still mostly carnivorous but might eat the odd bit of vegetable now and then; the mainstay of their diet should be a good quality pellet.

Musks mix well with most other turtles provided the conditions are right, they can be aggressive towards each other especially adult males. Although not the best swimmers, they make excellent pets, as they seem to possess fascinating and engaging personalities. Provided they are kept in the right conditions, they will live in captivity between 30 and 40 years.