

# Sliders and Cooters

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Sliders - Red Ears, Yellow Bellies, and Cumberlands



All of the North American slider species require the same basic care, although there are slight differences between the sub-species. Red Eared Sliders tend to be more aggressive, Yellow Bellied Sliders tend to be strong baskers and can suffer more from shell issues without proper UVB lighting and diet, and Cumberlands tend to be more shy. Tropical sliders such as the Belize have very similar care requirements, except for preferring the temperature a few degrees warmer. Cooters also have very similar requirements to NA sliders, with just some small differences in their diet.

Sliders are currently the most commonly available terrapin in the UK although Red Eared Sliders specifically are now banned from import due to many being released when they grew too large. Males will grow to around 7-9", and females to around 10-12" (although often bigger), and given the proper care, they will live over 40 years. They become sexually mature after around 3 or 4 years, by which time they will be around 4-5" you can't sex them until then so always bear in mind that you may end up with a 12"+ terrapins! Once they are sexually mature, male sliders develop longer, thicker tails than females, and noticeably longer front claws, in the region of 1" or more. This is also true for cooters, which grow between 9-12" for males, and 12-16" for females.

A rough guide of 40L of water (not just tank size) per inch SCL of terrapin is advised, with an additional 20L per inch of terrapin for each additional terrapin, although separation may still be necessary later in life. The recommended substrate is river rock (large smooth pebbles), as this is too large to be eaten, and a single layer is fairly easy to keep clean as the gaps are large enough to easily clean between, many keepers opt for no substrate as this makes cleaning even easier. Recommended filtration is via an external filter rated for at least twice (preferably three times) the actual amount of water in the tank as internal filters do not have either the flow or the media capacity to handle terrapin mess. A small internal filter can however be added with activated carbon to keep the water extra clean and also to break the surface tension to prevent build up of an oily film, or an air stone would also work well and give the terrapin(s) bubbles to play in. Regular water testing and partial changes are important, as well as "vacuuming" of the tank to remove the larger mess, and live plants are also recommended to help maintain water quality.

A water temperature of around 25- 27C is needed for hatchlings, dropping to 22- 24C for juveniles, and adults are fine at 20C which means a heater is usually unnecessary in a normally heated house. A basking area should be provided where they can dry off completely with a good strong source of UVB (a bulb should have a minimum of 8% UVB) such as a ReptiGlo 8.0 or 10.0 and a heat source to maintain a basking temp of 30- 35C for 10-14 hours a day. A Mercury Vapour Bulb is an ideal solution for larger tanks as they provide both heat and a level of UVB lighting close to that of natural sunlight. A floating Turtle Dock makes an ideal basking area, although something more substantial will be required as they get older and heavier. A good sized piece of corkbark is ideal, or a number of people choose to make a fixed basking area above, or just inside the tank, sometimes incorporating a sandy laying area if they have an adult female. An outdoor pond is fine for adult sliders, and is recommended especially when they get to around full size as this gives them plenty of swimming space, ideal water quality, and access to natural sunlight.

A good quality pellet (such as Reptomin) is an ideal staple food, 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 2 or 3 times a week by a couple of years old. Always provide plenty of veg in the form of kale, dandelion greens (watch out for chemicals which could come from pesticides), and pretty much any aquatic plants, but duckweed is especially good for nutrition and seems to be a favourite. Cooters are mainly herbivorous, and so it is especially important that these greens are offered.

If you like, and can verify the source to ensure they are healthy, then live foods are great. Feeder guppies are great for some of the better hunters, snails are great for most terrapins, you can breed these yourself. People also offer crickets and mealworms as these are generally sold for reptile food anyway and can be "gut-loaded" with nutrient rich foods to add vitamins and minerals to the diet. Live foods should only be given as a treat once every week or 2 instead of a pellet day. Adding cuttlefish bone to the tank for them to nibble on as and when they choose is a great source of calcium. Handling is not recommended unless necessary as they can carry various bacteria including salmonella, but proper hygiene routines like washing your hands after handling using anti-bacterial soap minimises the potential risk.