



Adult Red-Footed Tortoise Care Guide

This guide is designed to help potential adopters understand the husbandry needs of an adult red-footed tortoise before bringing one home. Red-footed tortoises are tropical, non-hibernating tortoises that need warm temperatures, moderate-to-high humidity, generous floor space, varied nutrition, and long-term commitment. With proper care, they can live for decades and become steady, confident, rewarding companions.



About the Red-Footed Tortoise

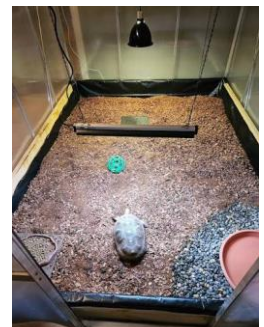
The red-footed tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonarius*) is a South American species found in warm, often humid habitats rather than dry desert environments. Adults commonly reach around 30–40 cm in shell length, though some grow larger. They do not hibernate. Compared with many Mediterranean tortoises, they generally need higher humidity, a more varied omnivorous diet, and consistent warmth throughout the year.

Enclosure and Space Requirements

An adult red-footed tortoise needs substantial floor space. A practical minimum for one adult is about 8 ft x 4 ft indoors, with larger always preferred. In warm weather, secure outdoor access is highly beneficial if temperatures are suitable. Enclosures should have solid sides, good ventilation, at least one warm hide and one cooler hide, a shallow water area for drinking and soaking, and enough open space to walk, browse, and explore. Glass aquariums are generally not suitable for adults because they limit floor space and can create poor airflow or stress from visible boundaries.

You would need to have an enclosure purpose built as regular tortoise tables, even large ones are not suitable.

Some examples below.



Substrate and Humidity

Red-footed tortoises do best with a substrate that supports natural behaviours and helps hold moisture without becoming stagnant which can create mould. Good options include organic topsoil (free from fertilisers and pesticides), coco coir, cypress mulch, or a soil-based blend designed to stay lightly damp in part of the enclosure. A humid hide or damp moss area can be very useful. Humidity should be kept moderately high, commonly around 50–70%, with many keepers aiming toward the upper end for indoor setups while still maintaining airflow. Avoid loose wood chip substrates that may be swallowed or contribute to blockages, and avoid feeding directly on loose substrate – a slate is helpful as this supports prevention of beak and nail overgrowth.

Temperature and Lighting

Provide a warm basking area of about 32–35°C and a cooler end around 24–26°C so the tortoise can thermoregulate. Overnight temperatures should not be allowed to fall too low; keeping night temperatures roughly above 21–25°C. All heat sources should be controlled by suitable thermostats and checked with reliable thermometers. Red-footed tortoises also require full-spectrum lighting with UVB exposure during the day, typically for around 12 hours. Lighting and heating should be arranged so the tortoise can choose between warmer and cooler zones rather than being forced into a single temperature throughout the enclosure.

Diet and Feeding

Red-footed tortoises are not strict grazers like many Mediterranean tortoises. Adults do best on a varied diet based mainly on leafy greens, weeds, and other fibrous plant matter, with fruit fed in moderation, and occasional appropriate protein.

Good staple foods often include dandelion leaves, plantain, sow thistle, hibiscus leaves and flowers, collard greens, spring greens, escarole, and other high-fibre greens. Fruit should be treated as a smaller portion of the diet rather than the main component. Avoid relying heavily on supermarket lettuce with poor nutritional value.

- Offer most often: mixed weeds, leafy greens, edible flowers, and high-fibre plant foods.
- Offer regularly but in smaller amounts: grated or chopped vegetables such as butternut squash or similar tortoise-safe vegetables.
- Offer in moderation: fruit such as mango, berries, or melon.
- Offer occasionally animal protein such as boiled egg, worms, small pinkies. Or formulated tortoise diets suitable for omnivorous tropical tortoises – such as Mazuri.
- Use a calcium powder to dust the food a few times a week, in addition to a D3 calcium powder once a week. Cuttlebone is also very good for torts.



Water and Hydration

Fresh water must be available at all times in a shallow, stable dish that the tortoise can easily enter and leave. Many red-footed tortoises enjoy soaking, and regular access to water helps support hydration, normal urates, and healthy shedding.

Enrichment, Routine, and Handling

Red-footed tortoises benefit from visual barriers, hides, gentle changes in terrain, safe edible plants, and opportunities to explore. They should not live on a bare setup with only a heat lamp and food dish. Handling should be calm, brief, and purposeful. Most adults tolerate routine interaction well, but they should not be passed around, carried unnecessarily, or kept in noisy, high-traffic conditions. A settled routine, warm environment, and access to privacy are all important for confidence and appetite.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Spot-clean the enclosure daily by removing faeces, leftover food, and heavily soiled substrate. Clean and refill the water dish every day. Regularly check temperatures, humidity, bulbs, thermostats, and general enclosure safety. A more thorough clean should be carried out routinely, while still preserving enough established substrate in bioactive or naturalistic systems if that is part of the setup. Good hygiene reduces the risk of flies, mould, bacterial build-up, and preventable disease.

Health Warning Signs

- Poor appetite or refusal to eat
- Weight loss or reduced activity
- Swollen eyes, eye discharge, or third eyelid covering eye
- Nasal bubbles, wheezing, or open-mouth breathing
- Soft shell areas or abnormal shell growth
- Persistent diarrhoea or very abnormal urates
- Repeated attempts to escape, prolonged hiding, or marked behaviour change

Any tortoise showing these signs should be assessed by an experienced reptile vet. New adopters should identify a suitable vet before bringing a tortoise home.

Adult Red-Footed Tortoise Setup Checklist

- Large adult-sized enclosure with secure, solid sides and suitable humidity set up
- Safe basking heat source and thermostat
- UVB lighting suitable for tortoises
- Digital thermometers and a hygrometer (to measure humidity)
- Moisture-retentive substrate and a humid hide
- Multiple hides and visual barriers



- Shallow water dish large enough for soaking
- Food slate, tray, or dish to reduce substrate ingestion
- Calcium supplement and access to varied fresh foods
- Cleaning supplies safe for reptile environments
- Access to an experienced reptile or exotics vet

Is a Red-Footed Tortoise the Right Fit?

Adult red-footed tortoises are best suited to adopters who can provide year-round warmth, humidity control, generous space, varied feeding, and long-term veterinary support. They are not a 'set and forget' pet, and they are not cared for in the same way as Mediterranean tortoises. If you can meet their tropical care needs consistently, they can do very well in captivity and make excellent long-term rescue placements.

This care guide is intended as a practical starting point for potential adopters. Individual tortoises may have specific medical or husbandry needs based on their history, age, growth, previous diet, and prior housing.

If a red footed tortoise is right for you, you can find information on how you can apply on our website www.torttowersrescue.com