

Rhodes Veterinary Surgery
95 Queens park parade
Northampton

01604 712070

Feeding Mediterranean Tortoises



Mediterranean species includes: *Testudo graeca*, *Testudo hermanni*, *Testudo marginata* and *T. horsfieldii* or more commonly known as greek spur-thighed, hermanns, marginated and horsfields tortoises.

Diet the wild

In the wild, tortoises tend to be browsers. They wander over a large area and in the process take small quantities of a wide variety of food.

These tortoises' diet in the wild consists almost entirely of herbaceous and succulent vegetation, including leaves, grasses, flowers and very very occasionally fallen berries. Fruit is categorically not a regular or significant component of their diet. These tortoises are almost exclusively herbivorous. They require a high fibre, low fruit, low protein, low phosphorus and high calcium diet to ensure good digestive function and smooth shell growth. Incorrect diets can have disastrous results not only shell deformities but kidneys and liver failure too.

Calcium:phosphorus ratio

It is important for normal growth to have the correct Ca:PO₄ ratio. This means high calcium and low phosphorus. As this is very difficult to achieve on a day to day basis in our captive tortoises diets it is advised to supplement twice weekly with a supplement such as [Nutrabol \(Vetark\)](#) and daily with a natural supplement such as ground cuttlefish.

There are some foods that should only be used in moderation as they contain acids (oxalic and phytic acids) which inhibit calcium uptake in the gut, these include mustard greens, turnip greens, kale, cabbage, bok choy, spinach, chard, collard green, peas, beans and related legumes.

Calcium and vitamin D

Natural sunlight contains UV-B radiation which is required by the tortoise to internally synthesize vitamin-D₃. This is required by the tortoise to enable it to use the calcium it consumes in its food. Without an adequate level of D₃, this calcium is useless for building bones. In order to synthesize D₃ properly, both UV-B radiation and radiant heat is required. This can be supplied via UV-B light strips (which if kept mainly indoors need 6 monthly changing) and natural sunlight without any glass barrier.

Definite no's

Tortoises should not be given under any circumstances, dairy products, chocolate, meat or banana (very high in phosphorus). Also Commercial tortoise food is not recommended as the sole diet as need a varied diet and can they contain too high protein and sugar levels.

Examples of appropriate wild food

These can all be grown in the garden. Care as to not pick any treated with pesticides or next to any main roads (pollution). Only pick weeds that you can definitely identify.

Here is a website with some good pictures to help you identify weeds:

<http://www.tlady.clara.net/TortGuide/Diet.htm#plantlist>

Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*

Hawkbits & Cat's-ears *Leontodon & hypochoeris spp*

Hawk's-beards *Crepis biennis & capillaris*

Nipplewort *Lapsana communis*

Chicory *Cichorium intybus*

Sow thistle *Sonchus oleraceus & arvensis*

Plantains *Plantago major, media & lanceolata*

Mallows *Malva sylvestris, neglecta & moschata*

Shepherd's purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*

Bittercress *Cardamine hirsuta & flexuosa*

White/Dutch clover *Trifolium repens*

Red clover *Trifolium pratense*

Common vetch *Vicia sativa*

Bush vetch *Vicia sepium*

Tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*

Sainfoin *Onobrychis sativa*

Creeping Bell-flower *Campanula rapunculoides*

Bindweeds *Convolvulus & calystegia spp*

Stonecrops *Sedum album & spectabile*

Hedge mustard *Sisymbrium officinale*

Honeysuckle (flowers) *Lonicera periclymenum & caprifolium*

Heartsease *Viola tricolor*

Robinia (pseudo-acacia) leaves

Wild clematis

Acanthus

Nettles

A couple of examples of suitable supermarket bought foods are, lambs lettuce and watercress. A further few examples of treats that can be given occasionally consist of tomatoes, cucumber and strawberries.