

## Water

Fresh water should always be available. At least one shallow, heavy water dish must be provided. This dish must be large enough for the skink to fit his whole body into. It must be easy for your skink to climb into and out of the dish. The water dish should be cleaned daily or more frequently if it becomes soiled.

## Supplements

Food should be dusted with a calcium carbonate supplement at least 2-3 times weekly. A reptile multivitamin should be supplemented weekly to every other week.

## Tips For a Happy, Healthy Animal

- Have your skink examined by an experienced reptile vet as soon as you acquire the skink.
- Keep substrate and enclosure clean.
- Provide proper UVB lighting for 12 hours a day.
- Provide substrate to allow for burrowing.

## It is Important to Avoid

- Close contact with heat sources.
- Unsecured housing.
- Contact with dogs or cats.
- Soiled substrate and water.
- Allowing the enclosure to get too hot or to cold.

## Common Disorders

- Nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism ("metabolic bone disease")
- Respiratory infections
- Abnormal or incomplete shedding
- Fungal skin infections
- Thermal burns from improper heat sources
- Bite wounds from other skinks if not housed individually or from live prey items
- Parasites (internal or external)
- Stomatitis or "mouth rot"
- Obesity
- Many commonly seen conditions are the result of malnutrition and/or inadequate housing and are preventable.

## Additional Reading

*Blue-tongued skinks: contributions to the knowledge of *Tiliqua* and *Cyclodomorphus*.* Edited by Hitz R, Shea G, Hauschild A, et al. 2004.

<http://www.reptilesmagazine.com/Care-Sheets/Lizards/Blue-Tongue-Skink>

Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your Blue Tongue Skink. For help in finding a reptile/amphibian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians ([www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org)) or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners ([www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate))

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR BLUE TONGUE SKINK HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!



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## NATURAL HISTORY

Blue tongued skinks (*Tiliqua spp.*) are terrestrial, diurnal, omnivorous lizards that are native to Australia, Tasmania, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia. They are the most common skink group to be kept in captivity due to their beautiful coloration and interactive personalities. There are many species and subspecies of blue tongue skinks. The most common species kept as pets are the Indonesian blue tongue skink (*Tiliqua gigas*), the Australian blue tongue skink (*Tiliqua scincoides*), and the Shingleback skink (*Tiliqua rugosa*). Their natural environments vary greatly - from open woodlands, to forest margins, to semi-deserts. Tiliqua species have a wide variety of color morphs, patterns, and scalation. The unifying feature of the blue tongued skink is their bright blue tongue, which is used as part of a defensive display. They are a moderately difficult species to keep in captivity.

## What to Expect From My Animal

Blue tongue skinks have a reputation for being friendly and easy to handle. Some may even seek out contact with humans. It is recommended to handle your skink for 5-10 minutes at a time several times weekly to help build positive associations with this activity and decrease fear responses. Approaching your skink slowly from the side is usually less scary than grabbing them from above or with any fast movements.

## Is My Animal Male or Female?

In general, blue tongue skinks are not considered sexually dimorphic, meaning that you cannot tell the sex of your skink by physical characteristics. However, male skinks may have broader, more triangular heads; a thicker tail base; and narrower bodies than females. Males may also have more brightly colored orange/red eyes, while females tend to have browner eyes. An experienced reptile veterinarian can help determine the sex of your skink using physical attributes and usually a ultrasound examination to confirm.

## Housing and Substrate

Blue tongue skinks are terrestrial lizards. They require large horizontal spaces and do not need much vertical space. Although larger enclosures are always better, adult skinks can be housed in an enclosure that is at least 3' long, 2' wide, and 1' high (90cm long, 60cm wide, 30cm high). Juvenile skinks tend to do better in smaller areas initially. Enclosures must be well secured with locks on the lid to prevent your skink from escaping.

Blue tongue skinks like to burrow and should be provided a loose substrate. Good options include aspen, fir bark, cypress mulch, and recycled paper bedding. The substrate must be mixed daily and changed weekly. Never use pine or cedar shavings as the aromatic oils are irritating to their eyes, nose, and scales. Clay cat litter and walnut shells should also be avoided. To prevent accidental ingestion of substrate, use a feeding dish or feed the skink in a substrate-free container.

Cage accessories should consist of multiple hide boxes large enough for the skink to crawl underneath, with at least one hide box on the cool end and one hide box on the warm end of the enclosure. Hides can be as simple as a half a flower pot, half log, or as complicated as a custom made rock structure. All cage furniture should be low to the ground and secured to prevent it from falling on your skink. Adjusting the cage furnishings regularly is strongly recommended to provide environmental enrichment.

# WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY BLUE TONGUE SKINK

### Vital Statistics:

#### Body length

Adults can reach 18-24 inches (45-60cm)

#### Body weight

Varies with species but ranges from 280 – 520 grams

#### Age of sexual maturity

2 years

#### Longevity

15-20 years, possibly longer

● Smooth shiny scales

● Bright clear eyes

● Nose and mouth free from discharge or debris

● Long, almost cylindrical body

● Holding body off ground

● Clean cloacal vent

**NOTE: Most, if not all, reptiles and amphibians carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles and amphibians, including blue tongued skinks. For more information, please see the handout, Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.**



## Temperature and Humidity Requirements

Your skink will require moderate ambient temperatures and low humidity conditions.

Ceramic heat emitters and other heat producing bulbs can be used to increase the ambient temperature. Under tank heaters and heat tape can also be used, but with caution as skinks like to burrow and can get too close to these heat sources resulting in thermal burns. The heat source should always be placed outside the cage, as skinks may burn themselves if they have direct access to it. "Hot rocks" and "heat caves" should never be used, as they can lead to severe burns.

The enclosure temperatures for most species should range from 75-85° Fahrenheit (24-29° Celsius), with a basking spot maintained at 90-100° Fahrenheit (32-38° Celsius). The temperature on the cool side of the enclosure may be allowed to drop to 70° Fahrenheit (21° Celsius) at night. Ideally, these temperatures should be maintained with a thermostat and monitored with two thermometers, one on the warm end of the enclosure and one on the cool end of the enclosure.

Humidity requirements can vary from 25% to 45%, depending on the species being kept. It is crucial to investigate the proper humidity range for the individual species being kept. Use a hygrometer to monitor the humidity levels. Providing a "humid hide" (a box containing 1-2" of wet paper towels or damp sphagnum moss) helps create a localized area of higher humidity within the enclosure, which can help with skin shedding and provide the skink with choices for a humidity range.

## Lighting Requirements

Full spectrum UVA and UVB lighting must be provided for 12 hours each day. The lights should be positioned 8-12" above the basking area. These lights should be replaced every 6 months to ensure that they are still effective. UV lights will continue to produce visible light even after the filaments producing UVB waves are gone.

## Diet

Tiliqua species are omnivorous. Their diet should consist of 60% plant material (50% greens/vegetables and 10% fruit) and 40% animal protein.

- Vegetable options: dark leafy greens (collards, dandelion, mustard, escarole, etc.), green beans, peas, corn, squash, carrots, parsnips, sweet potato, zucchini, bell peppers, parsley, hibiscus flowers

- Fruit options: berries, cherries, peaches, nectarines, pears, banana, melons, mango, papaya

- Animal protein options: gut-loaded insects (earthworms, crickets, roaches, snails, mealworms, occasional waxworms, etc.), rodents (pinkie and fuzzy mice), and occasionally hard boiled eggs. Whole ground prey diets ([www.reptilinks.com](http://www.reptilinks.com)) can be purchased and fed intermittently to increase variety.

Juveniles should be fed once daily, while adults should be fed every 2-3 days.