



Reeves Turtles

Mauremys reevesii

BEGINNER · AQUATIC · 4–6 IN ADULT · 15–25 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL BASKER · EAST ASIA

The turtle to buy instead of the red-eared slider you'll outgrow. Reeves turtles are small East Asian pond turtles, hardy and calm, and they top out at six inches rather than dinner-plate size. The honest headline: small turtle, big water. Beginner-friendly still means a filtered, heated aquarium and fifteen to twenty-five years of upkeep. The species is endangered in the wild, so buy captive-bred.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Water & ambient	72–78 °F
Basking spot	82–88 °F
Night drop	65–72 °F
UVB	Required
Diet	Pellets, insects, fish, greens
Feeding	Every 1–2 days
Adult size	4–6 inches
Lifespan	15–25 years



Captive-bred Reeves turtles show up on NARBC vendor tables every season: a smaller, calmer alternative to the usual sliders.

Photo: Samuele Papeschi / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Calm, But Not a Handling Pet

Reeves turtles have a calm, unbothered disposition, which is exactly why people misread them. Calm means they tolerate a keeper leaning over the tank; it doesn't mean they enjoy being picked up. Handle for health checks, moves and cleaning, then put them back. This is a watching animal, and a settled Reeves will beg at the glass every time you walk past. That is the relationship on offer, and it is a good one.

02

Housing: Water and a Way Out

Water they can use, land they can reach. That is the floor plan. Fill the tank deep enough that an adult can swim and right itself, and give it a dry platform it can haul out onto completely. Length and width beat height. The table below runs from a 20×12×12 hatchling setup to a 72×24×24 adult; a pond works outdoors in temperate climates. Keep one turtle per tank. Males harass tankmates, and bitten tails and feet are how it shows; sliders bully them worse.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	20×12×12	30×12×12	Hardy hatchlings, but start them in shallow water they can stand up in.
Juvenile	36×18×18	48×18×18	Moderate swimmers; less frantic in the water than young sliders.
Subadult	48×18×18	60×24×18	Finishes smaller than a slider, but still needs the full adult footprint.
Adult	60×24×18	72×24×24	Cold-tolerant; a predator-proof outdoor pond works in temperate climates.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance for *Mauremys reevesii*. Dimensions in inches; horizontal space is the priority, so wider beats taller.

03

Heat, Basking and UVB

Run the water and room at 72–78 °F, with a basking platform hitting 82–88 °F directly under the lamp. A night drop to 65–72 °F is fine and healthy. UVB is required, not optional: without it a growing turtle builds a soft, lumpy shell that never comes right. Mount the UVB over the dry basking spot, never through glass or plastic, which filters most of it out. Replace the bulb on schedule, because output dies long before the light does.

04

Water Quality & Filtration

This is the whole job. A turtle eats, swims and defecates in one box of water, so **over-filter the tank and change water on a schedule you actually keep**. Canister filters earn their price here. Dechlorinate top-ups so you don't wipe out the filter bacteria, guard the heater so a turtle can't wedge against it, and test ammonia and nitrite while a new setup cycles. Cloudy water and a sour smell mean you are already behind.

05

Substrate & Furnishing

Bare bottom is the honest default. It cleans in seconds and nothing gets swallowed. If you want a planted look, use river stones too large to fit in a turtle's mouth, and skip loose sand and fine gravel, which juveniles will eat. Then give them structure to work: driftwood, a slate or cork ramp up to the basking platform, and a shaded corner out of the lamp. Hardy plants still get eaten; treat them as salad, not landscaping.

06

Feeding

Reeves turtles are omnivores: a quality aquatic turtle pellet as the base, plus insects, fish and greens. Feed every 1–2 days, and measure by the animal rather than the bag. Growing turtles want more animal protein, while adults shift toward greens and go soft if you keep feeding them like hatchlings. A begging turtle isn't a hungry turtle; it's a trained one. Offer a cuttlebone, and feed in a separate tub to spare the filter.

07

Health Red Flags

Watch the shell and the eyes. A soft or lumpy, pyramided shell means UVB, calcium or both are wrong. Swollen, sealed eyes and a runny nose point at vitamin A deficiency or dirty water. A turtle that swims lopsided, gapes at the surface, or breathes with its mouth open is telling you about a respiratory infection. Shell rot shows up as soft pits or white patches. None of it resolves on its own: book a reptile vet, and test the water while you wait.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.