



Uromastyx

Uromastyx spp. (Mali: *U. dispar maliensis*)

INTERMEDIATE · 12–16 IN ADULT · 15–20 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL HERBIVORE · WEST AFRICA

A sun-worshipping vegetarian in a hobby full of insect eaters. Uromastyx (spiny-tailed lizards from the world's hottest deserts) are calm, hardy, and active all day, with the Mali the classic entry point. The honest part: they don't need crickets, they need heat and light most keepers have never provided. Think a basking site hotter than anything else in the reptile room, and strong UVB to match.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	12–16 in
Day ambient	85–95 °F
Basking spot	120–130 °F
Night temp	70–78 °F
Humidity	10–30%
UVB	Required: 12% T5 HO, 10–12 in
Diet	Daily leafy greens, seeds, lentils
Representative	Mali uromastyx



A Mali uromastyx, the hobby's benchmark species. Captive-bred animals are NARBC-table regulars. Look for bright color and a full, ringed tail.

Photo: David George / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Temperament & Handling

Calm is the word. A settled uromastyx spends its day basking, digging, and watching the room with real attention. The genus spans several species: ornate, Saharan geyri, the big Egyptian. But the Mali, in warm yellows and browns, is the hobby's most common and the usual first pick. They defend themselves with a spiked tail, not teeth, and most grow tolerant of calm, infrequent handling. The intermediate label isn't about temperament; it's about the hardware their desert body demands.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space beats height. Uromastyx patrol and dig, so run every enclosure horizontal and skip racks entirely; no rack can hold the heat and light this genus needs. House solo, too: males fight, and even a settled pair stresses quietly. Hatchlings can start in a 24×18×12, but plan for the 72×36×24 an adult deserves. Only a big footprint lets you hang a 120-degree basking zone at one end and leave honest cool retreat at the other.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×12	36×18×18	Even hatchlings need serious desert heat and UVB.
Juvenile	36×18×18	48×24×18	Slow grower. Expect 3–4 years to reach adult size.
Subadult	48×24×18	60×24×24	Deep substrate for burrowing is essential.
Adult	48×24×24	72×36×24	Extreme-heat species: basking surface 120–140 °F, with 12% T5 HO UVB 10–12 in over the mesh.

Enclosure minimums and preferred sizes follow Habitat-OS life-stage guidance (benchmark: Mali uromastyx).

03

Heat & Light

Here's the defining demand. Daytime ambient runs 85–95 °F with a night drop to 70–78 °F. The basking site, a flat rock under halogen floods, needs a surface temp of 120–130 °F, up to 140 °F for adults. Match it with UVB: **a 12% T5 HO tube on top of the mesh, 10 to 12 inches above the rock, is as non-negotiable as the heat.** That puts UVI near 4 to 6 where it basks. Glass blocks UVB entirely; mesh eats a quarter to a half. Verify temps with an infrared gun and run heat on a thermostat.

04

Humidity & Water

Ten to thirty percent is the driest end of the hobby, and keeping it there matters as much as the heat. Uromastyx drink their water as salad: fresh greens carry nearly all the moisture they need, and most ignore a bowl. If you offer one, make it small and occasional so ambient humidity stays low. Prioritize ventilation, never mist the enclosure, and treat persistent condensation as an equipment problem to fix.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

Adults are diggers, and deep substrate is essential: a firm sand-and-soil mix they can tunnel into, packed so burrows hold their shape. Save the loose stuff for subadults and adults; hatchlings and juveniles do better on paper or slate while they learn to hit their food. Furnish like a desert: flat basking stone, secured rock stacks, and tight crevice hides at both ends. A uromastyx with a burrow it dug itself is a settled uromastyx.

06

Feeding

Feed the tortoise diet, not the lizard diet. Uromastyx are herbivores: a daily salad of leafy greens (collard, mustard, dandelion) topped with dry seeds and lentils, which mirror the seed heads they raid in the wild. Skip insects; they don't need them, and animal protein burdens desert-built kidneys. Serve in the morning so the animal can bask hot and digest all day. Dust most salads with plain calcium, no D3 or phosphorus, plus a multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly as an adult.

07

Health Red Flags

Most uromastyx trouble traces to a setup too cool or too damp, and the lizard tells you early. A dark animal that stays dark all day, refuses food, and stops basking is cold or sick: check surface temps first. Persistently puffy or bubbling nostrils, a swollen or kinked tail tip, soft jaw, trembling limbs, or runny stool are past the DIY line. So is weight loss, hips and tail base going bony. Any of those means a reptile-vet visit now, not a forum thread.

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.