



Yellow-Bellied Sliders

Trachemys scripta scripta

BEGINNER · 8–12 IN ADULT · 20–40 YR LIFESPAN · AQUATIC · DIURNAL · SOUTHEASTERN U.S.

The turtle most people picture when they hear pet turtle, and the one most often outgrown. Yellow-bellied sliders are the southeastern cousin of the red-eared slider, and the care is the same: sun, swimming room, and water you keep clean. They're hardy, curious and long-lived, which is exactly the problem. A hatchling that fits in your palm becomes a dinner-plate adult needing a stock tank, and it will be your turtle for decades.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Beginner, but space-hungry
Water / ambient	75–80 °F
Basking spot	85–90 °F
Night drop	70–75 °F
UVB	High output, required, 12–15 in
Diet	Pellets, greens, fish, insects
Feeding cadence	Juveniles daily, adults alternate
Adult size	8–12 inches
Lifespan	20–40 years



Captive-bred yellow-bellied sliders fill NARBC breeder tables. The species starts palm-sized and finishes needing a stock tank or pond.
Photo: Douglas Goldman / iNaturalist · CC BY-SA

01

Bold, Hungry, Not for Handling

Yellow-bellies are the busybodies of the turtle world. They learn who brings food and paddle at the glass to beg, which reads as friendly and isn't. This is a watch-and-admire animal; being handled is stress, and a grown slider bites and rakes hard. Turtles carry *Salmonella*, so wash your hands after every session in the water. Cohab is where keepers get burned: sliders nip tails and feet, crowd each other off the basking spot, and males harass females relentlessly. Keep one per setup.

02

Space Is the Whole Game

The table below is a growth schedule, not a menu. A hatchling starts in a 24×12×12 footprint; a subadult needs 72×24×24, and that jump arrives sooner than most keepers plan for. Length and width come first, then depth, since depth is what turns a footprint into water a turtle can swim in. The working rule is ten gallons of water per inch of shell, so most adults finish up in a stock tank or a garden pond rather than a glass aquarium. Buy for the adult, not the hatchling.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×12×12	36×18×18	Care is virtually identical to a red-eared slider's from day one.
Juvenile	48×18×18	60×24×24	A southeastern US native, often sharing ponds with red-eared sliders.
Subadult	72×24×24	96×24×24	Same size trajectory as its red-eared cousin. Upgrade early.
Adult	96×24×24	stock tank or pond	The space formula: ten gallons of water per inch of shell.

Minimum and preferred enclosure sizes from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance; dimensions in inches.

03

Basking Heat and UVB

Sliders are sun turtles. Give them a dry platform they can climb fully out on, lit to 85–90 °F by an overhead bulb, with water and air at 75–80 °F and a night drop to 70–75 °F. Without UVB the shell grows soft and deformed. Mount a high-output T5 tube over the screen, 12 to 15 inches above the platform, for a basking UVI near 3. Glass blocks UVB completely; mesh takes a quarter to half. Replace the tube on the maker's schedule; output fades first. Skip heat rocks.

04

Water Quality & Filtration

Humidity doesn't apply to a slider; water quality is the whole job. They eat hard and foul water fast, and dirty water is what drives shell rot, swollen eyes and skin infections. Run a canister filter rated well above your actual volume, siphon the bottom, and do partial changes to a schedule. **Change the water on a calendar, not when it finally looks bad.** Dechlorinate what goes in. Feeding in a separate tub keeps most of the mess out of the system.

05

Substrate and Furnishings

A bare bottom is the honest choice: it siphons clean in seconds and nothing gets swallowed. If you want substrate, use river stones too large to fit in the turtle's mouth. Pea gravel and loose sand end in impaction. Live plants are salad rather than decor, so expect them shredded. Real enrichment here is structure to swim around, a current to work against, and a basking ledge with grip plus a low ramp an old or heavy turtle can still climb.

06

Feeding an Omnivore

Sliders are omnivores. A quality aquatic turtle pellet is the base; leafy greens, fish and insects fill in around it. Juveniles eat daily, adults every other day, and grown turtles want more plants and less protein than the young ones do. Offer what the turtle can finish in a few minutes, then stop. Overfed sliders are the rule rather than the exception, and the shell keeps the record. Float a cuttlebone so they can graze it for calcium.

07

Health Red Flags

Watch the eyes and the shell. Swollen or shut eyelids point to dirty water and a thin diet. Soft spots or a lumpy, pyramided shell mean UVB and calcium have failed. Pitted, foul-smelling patches are shell rot. The urgent one is respiratory infection: a turtle that swims tilted, floats lopsided, breathes open-mouthed or blows bubbles from its nose needs a reptile vet now. A slider that quits basking is telling you something.

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.