



## Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection

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# Blue-Tongue Skinks

*Tiliqua* spp.

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## RANGE

Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea. The different species found variously in open woodlands, at the margins of forest and field, semi-deserts. Heavily build, broad bodies set on small legs with delicate toes. Broad, blunt triangular head typical of skinks. Deep, berry blue tongue vividly offset against the deep pink interior of mouth.

## SPECIES

*T. adelaidensis* - South Australia/Tasmania

*T. gigas* - New Guinea Blue Tongue Skink - This skink is gray or gray brown with irregular narrow bands of dark brown across the back. Distribution: Indonesia (Ambon, Ceram, Ternate, Halmahera, Ke, Aru), Papua New Guinea, Jobi, Admiralty Islands, New Britain, Bismarck Archipelago.

*T. mustifaciata* - Central Blue-Tongued Skink

Found in desert and tropical environments. Grows to 40-45 cm./15.5-17.5 in., feeds on wildflowers, small vertebrates, and insects. Produces 2-5 live young. Distribution: North Territory, Queensland, South Australia, West Australia.

*T. nigrolutea* - Blotched Blue-Tongued Skink

Also known as Black and Yellow Blue-tongued. Southern Australia and Tasmania. Brown/black with yellowish, irregularly spotted and striped pattern. Grows to 60 cm./23.5 in. Omnivorous. Produces 4-10 live young. Often crosses with *T. scincoides*, offspring are not sterile. Distribution: New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria.

*T. occipitalis* - Western Blue-Tongued Skink

Likes dry habitats, compact animal with short tail-growing to 50 cm./ 19.5 in. Compact with short tail; reddish brown with light crossbanding. Likes berries and spiders. Produces 5-10 live young. Distribution: New South Wales, North Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, West Australia

*T. rugosa* - Shingleback Skink

Distribution: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, West Australia

*T. scincoides scincoides* - Common/Eastern Blue-Tongued Skink

Likes semi-desert to agricultural areas. Grows to 60 cm./23.5 in. (average 45 cm./17.5 in.). May be different subspecies since external differences are noted. Feeds on small animals, plant material. Often found in suburban gardens. Hardy in captivity. Averages 6-12 live young.

*T. scincoides intermedia* - Northern Blue-Tongued Skink

Likes tropical/savannah woodlands -growing to 60 cm./23.5 in. Produces 5-20 live young. The best choice for handleable pets.

## Other Blue-tongue skinks:

*Cyclodomorphus branchialis* - Common Slender Bluetongue. Distribution: Northern Territories, Queensland,

South Australia, Western Australia

*Cyclodomorphus casuarinae* - She-oak Slender Bluetongue, She-oak Skink

*Cyclodomorphus celatus* - Distribution: lower West coastal areas, including islands

*Cyclodomorphus maxima* - Giant Slender Bluetongue. Distribution: Western Australia

*Cyclodomorphus melanops elongatus* - Slender Bluetongue. Distribution: Western Australia. Also *C. m. melanops* and *C. m. sticulosus*.

*Cyclodomorphus michaeli* - Coastal She-Oak Slender Bluetongue Distribution: lower altitudes of mainland Australia, NSW south

*Cyclodomorphus praealtus* - Alpine She-Oak Slender Bluetongue. Distribution: Australian Alps, Victoria

*Cyclodomorphus venustus* - (Sapphire) Slender Bluetongue. South Australia

*Hemisphaeriodon gerrardii* (previously: *T. gerrardii*; sometimes *Cyclodomorphus gerrardii*) - Australian Pink-Tongued skink

Found in New South Wales, Eastern Australia. Grows to 40-45 cm./ 15.5-17.5 in. This skink lives in a wetter forest habitat than the other Australian Skinks, is nocturnal in warm weather and diurnal in cold and feeds almost exclusively on snails and slugs. Produces 12-25 live young in summer. Distribution: New South Wales, Queensland.

## Housing

Hatchlings can be kept in 10 gal. Adults require at minimum 40-55 gal tanks; these lizards are wide-ranging in the wild and so do better in much larger enclosures.

Substrate can be clean dust-free pine (not cedar) shavings, aspen shavings or cypress mulch.

Most prefer snug hides, so hide boxes, rock caves or half logs will be needed.

While these are ground dwelling lizards, they do have to clamber over things to get their relatively large bodies over things with their outlandishly tiny legs and feet. Many seem to enjoy the exploration and exercise climbing over and through things gives them, so providing different levels of branches and logs for them to climb on will make for better adjusted lizards. This also means that top-opening tanks need to be securely fastened, and open-top tanks need to be deep enough to prevent the skink from climbing out.

One area of slightly damp substrate should be kept, or a humidity retreat box (into which they can freely climb in and out, filled with damp sphagnum moss or a loosely piled damp towel, for use during shed periods).

## Water

They should have a bowl of water available at all times. They may defecate in it so it should be checked regularly. Bowl should be big enough for them to climb easily in and out of if it is to be used for bathing.

## Light

Regular exposure to UVB wavelengths are strongly recommended. This can be furnished by close proximity to a Vita-Lite or Zoo Med Iguana or Reptisun fluorescent lights (5.0+) or direct sunlight. If using the latter, be sure that there is a cooler retreat for the skink to go to. They do not tolerate very high temperatures and can easily become prostrate by the buildup of heat in their enclosure.

## Temperature

The overall gradient should range from the mid 70s on the cool side to the mid 80s on the warm side. A warmer basking area, with temps well into the 90s, must also be provided during the day. Depending on the type of skink and its place of origin, some will do better with basking areas into the low 100s, while others need basking temps in the low to mid 90s. Observe your lizard for signs of temperature related [stress](#), and

adjust accordingly.

A people heating pad under the tank at one end, and a radiant heat source overhead at the same end, will generally be all that is required to establish the necessary gradient. Cold winter weather outside will require additional heating or a stronger bulb in the enclosure. Temps should not be allowed to fall below 70 F at night on the cool side.

## Diet

Blue-tongues are omnivores, consuming both plant and animal matter. Their diet should be about 60% plant and 40% animal. A basic mixed vegetable salad can be prepared similar to that fed to [green iguanas](#). Along with the salad, thinly sliced greens (collards, dandelion, escarole) can be mixed into the mixed vegetables.

Frozen vegetable mixes are either mostly corn and carrots, or mostly cauliflower and broccoli. Neither are particularly good for skinks and other animals. Corn and carrots convert quickly to sugars, and carrots have oxalates, which bind calcium, preventing its uptake. Cauliflower and broccoli contain goitrogens which bind iodine, leading to impaired thyroid function. In addition, the thiaminase in frozen green vegetables and greens destroys the thiamin (B1) in the plant; when fed regularly, this leads to a [thiamin deficiency](#). If you use frozen vegetables or freeze your own fresh salad.

Many skinks seem to relish berries and juicy fruits, so think about keeping a supply of frozen blueberries and cherries around, as well as fresh berries, peaches, nectarines, and pears during the season. A bite or two of banana is generally not refused, either.

Hatchling skinks can be started on mealworms, redworms, small crickets, and pinkie mice. As they grow, increase the size of the prey (small earthworms, Zoophoba larvae and pupae, fuzzies and crews).

Feed the skinks *ad lib*, that is, however much they want to eat, when they want to eat. Feeding frequency will taper off as they grow, so you may find that you are offering food 2-4 times a week. Blue-tongues are pretty eloquent when they are hungry (they clearly fixate on your hands and any other perceived movement, often with their mouth open and body ready to charge or pounce), so they are unlikely to go hungry for long so long as you keep an eye on them.

Fresh drinking water should always be available for them.

## Handling

Blue-tongue skinks are very docile, curious lizards. They tame easily and are handleable by careful small children. They do develop claws, and while they don't particularly scratch, it can be startling and scary to someone who is nervous holding them, so always supervise people closely when first handling the lizard to them. Like many omnivorous and carnivorous lizards, blue-tongues find that wriggling human fingers look an awful lot like small wriggling mice...and may try to eat one if they are hungry. As with all such reptiles, it is best to wash your hands before handling them if you have been handling anything they normally eat.

## Sources

Obst, et al. Atlas of Reptiles and Amphibians. 1988. TFH Publishing.

[TIGR Lizards Database: Skinks](#)

[Kingsnake.com's Australian Lizards](#)

FAQs: Kirsten Kranz; Alan Beck and Linda Desmond

Queensland Museum: [Blue-tongue and Pink-Tongue Skinks](#)

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