



TORTOISE HIBERNATION CHECK LIST

Hibernation is an important part of tortoise management. It is part of the seasonal variation and gives tortoises a natural rest. If tortoises do not hibernate, the increased metabolism and food intake could lead to abnormal growth. When the days get shorter and the environmental temperatures decrease, tortoises get ready to hibernate. Hibernation can be a critical time for a tortoise and careful planning is necessary for a successful outcome.

Can I hibernate my tortoise?

Is your tortoise?

- A Mediterranean Tortoise (Hermann's, Spur-tighed, Horsield's and Marginated tortoise)
- Longer than 10 cm
- Older than 2 years of age
- Healthy with no chronic illness
- Owned for a few months (ideally 1 year)

Hibernation check list

- Cool room or reliable fridge
- Box
- Gardening compost
- Dry Leaves
- Shredded paper
- Tortoise table
- Scale
- Thermometer
- Chart/calendar

If you have answered yes to all the above questions then you can hibernate your tortoise.

Pre-conditioning (4-6 weeks): This is an important time to prepare your tortoise for hibernation. During pre-conditioning, the tortoise slowly winds down. At the end of this phase the tortoise should have: **the gastro-intestinal tract empty, the bladder full and they should be sleepier.**

1. Feed your tortoise regularly until the end of October .
2. Then, reduce the vivarian temperature to T 21-26°C for 2-3 weeks. During this time, it is important to stop feeding your tortoise but continue to bathe them every day.
3. Then, keep the tortoise at room temperature (T 16-20°C) for 1-2 weeks.
4. At this point the tortoise is ready to hibernate. **Take the body weight.**

Hibernation

Two methods are generally advised during hibernation: the fridge and the room method. Although the fridge method is preferred, tortoises can also hibernate in a cool room. **The ideal temperature during hibernation should be 4-5° C (Min and max: 0-10° C)** with good humidity and ventilation.

1. Place the tortoise in a small box with soil/garden compost.
2. Then place this box inside a bigger box containing dry leaves and shredded paper. Cardboard boxes are ideal. Check that they are not air-tight.
3. Finally place the boxes either in a cold room, on top of a table, or inside a fridge.
4. It is important to check the temperature in the room/fridge prior the hibernation.

Daily checks:

- ☞ Record Temperature (Max/Min)
- ☞ Open the door of the fridge to ventilate

Weekly checks:

- ☞ Record body weight
- ☞ Calculate weight loss
- ☞ Check the tortoise has not urinated
- ☞ Check there are not wounds

How long should my tortoise hibernate for?

- ☞ Young tortoises (> 2yrs): 3-4 weeks
- ☞ First hibernation: 2-3 weeks
- ☞ Every extra year of hibernation: add 1 week
- ☞ No longer than 3 months

Emergency during hibernation

Your tortoise must be woken up if:

- ☞ Body weight loss of 10% (e.g. 10 grams per 100 grams of body weight)
- ☞ Urine is found in the box
- ☞ Severe wounds
- ☞ The tortoise is awake, moving around

If you would like to **book a pre-hibernation check** for your tortoise with our Exotics vet Livia Benato, would like more information regarding hibernation or you are concerned about your tortoise during hibernation please contact **CityVets** on **01392 250066**.