

# Brumation in Reptiles

Brumation is a dormant period for reptiles. Much like hibernation in mammals, their bodies shut down and conserve energy for the coming winter period. It is triggered by drops in the temperature and a decrease in daylight hours or may even occur if food sources are scarce.

During the period of brumation, a reptile may not eat, drink, defecate, or move for several weeks. Sometimes they will stir for a drink of water. They may bury themselves completely underground or go to the darkest, coolest part of the enclosure. It can scare you when your pet doesn't respond to normal stimuli such as poking and prodding, but it is completely normal. Brumation can last for a few weeks to 4 months!

## Which Reptiles Brumate?

Bearded dragons are the most common reptile pets that brumate. Beardies can be very unpredictable and may brumate every year, never at all, for long periods of time, or on and off through a season. Other common reptiles that brumate include some turtles, tortoises, lizards and snakes.

Both males and females can go into brumation, with males usually emerging from their deep sleep before the females.

## Why Does a Reptile Brumate?

Pet reptiles have no reason to brumate but it is an instinctive behaviour, therefore, their bodies tell them to do it. Brumation is a natural thing that is completely safe for your healthy reptile. In the wild, some reptiles, like bearded dragons, may brumate to avoid cold temperatures and the lack of food and water. In captivity, even though their light cycles and



food may stay constant day after day, their biological clocks may take over and tell their bodies to shut down for a while.

## **Signs you bearded dragon may be ready to brumate:**

- It is autumn or winter months your area
- Their activity level is decreased
- They refuse greens entirely
- They eat fewer insects than they normally do or refuse insects entirely
- They sleep well past when they normally get up for the day
- They stop basking
- They spend a lot more time in their hides
- They get in their hides and then cover the entrance with a pile of substrate
- They spend days in their hide without coming out
- They remain groggy or sleepy even when you take them out and handle them

## **Preparing a Reptile for Brumation**

Make sure your reptile is healthy, free of parasites (both internal and external), and encourage it to defecate (try soaking your pet in some water and massaging its belly). In preparing for brumation reptiles should be given their last feed at least 14 days before

going into brumation (if their pattern is predictable).

Also, make sure the humidity and temperature in the enclosure are correct. Do not drop temps below 16°C). Make sure there are more than one hideout, usually on each side of the enclosure (hot and cold). A yearly check-up at the vet is a good idea. You will lessen the health risks of brumation with regular veterinary care.

It is not recommended that a reptile go into brumation during their first year of life as they generally have too much growing and development to do and they may not have built up enough stores to last the brumation period without food.

Animals need to be in good health and be at a good weight before going into brumation. If they aren't carrying good body condition or have underlying illnesses they may not survive the brumation period. To stop them from going into brumation be sure to keep their enclosure in a warm spot, use heat lamps and UV lamps to lengthen the daylight hours.

### **Prevention**

Check with your vet before. To avoid brumation altogether, make sure your temperatures, feedings, and lighting are all consistent. You should be able to interrupt your reptile's brumation period by handling your pet, as is encouraged when you offer water and food. Otherwise, brumation is a natural process, and although it is not without its risks. If your pet slips into brumation, help it rehydrate but otherwise leave your reptile alone.

### **Brumation concerns:**

Dehydration: soak your reptile for 15-20 minutes in a shallow dish of lukewarm water approximately once a week.

### **Behaviour changes:**

After coming out of brumation reproductive cycles commence and they can start displaying reproductive behaviours.

Males housed with other males can become aggressive towards each other. Females can start signalling to males they are ready (usually the "arm wave").

### **Tips:**

Do not panic

Do not feed

Have clean, fresh water readily available

Do not disturb/play with them during brumation but do check on them once in a while

After brumation keep the first few meals light  
Weigh before and after, they shouldn't lose more than 10%

After brumation your reptile should return to normal activity, eating and defecating.

If you should have concerns about your reptile before, during or after brumation please contact your veterinarian.

