

A “FREE” TURTLE? THINK AGAIN!

A brief look at the requirements and costs to keep a turtle

The story is an old one, happening time and again: Somehow you find yourself on the receiving end of an allegedly “free turtle.” While you know that there’s no such thing as a free ride or a free lunch, couldn’t there really be such a thing as a free turtle?

Well, as you probably guessed, the answer is “NO!” And depending upon the species, you could end up dropping a significant amount of cash into the hands of various retailers both local and out of state as you set up a proper enclosure for your new turtle.

I recently decided to enter the world of aquatic turtle-keeping, so I purchased a pair of hatchling Reeves’ Turtles (*Chinemys reevesii*) from a fellow member of the Rio Grande Turtle and Tortoise Club. In researching the requirements of this species, I learned that they are semi-aquatic, requiring both a land area and a good-sized water area to swim in. I knew that meant that I was going to have to start from scratch to set up an adequate enclosure for them.

Here’s a breakdown of the costs I incurred in setting up an aquarium for my little ones (all costs are rounded up to the nearest whole dollar, and my sources for each item are provided in parentheses):

Item	Source	Cost
20-long glass aquarium	Clark’s Pet Emporium	\$40.00
PennPlax Cascade 700 external canister filter	eBay	\$75.00
Aquarium test kit for pH, ammonia, and nitrates/nitrites; replacement filter floss and carbon packs for canister filter	Petco	\$39.00
An undergravel filter and an unbreakable aquarium heater	PetsMart	\$55.00
Reptile Lamp Stand and two Powersun UV bulbs	The Bean Farm (shipping was extra)	\$109.00
Six-outlet surge strip, Ground Fault Interrupt (GFI) circuit breaker, two 0.5-cubic-ft. bags of landscaper’s pea gravel	Lowe’s	\$31.00
Programmable digital lamp timer	Home Depot	\$12.00
Ready-to-Assemble TV stand	Wal-Mart	\$110.00
Total Cost for Initial Set-Up		\$471.00

I live in a small town in New Mexico, so the nearest city with stores selling pet supplies is Albuquerque. I tried to save money wherever I could by comparison-shopping, both online and around Albuquerque -- and where possible, shopping in non-pet stores for certain items. For example, the lamp timer and the pea gravel were significantly cheaper at Home Depot and Lowe’s. Aquarium gravel in pet stores is absurdly expensive! Simple landscaping gravel, well-rinsed, is perfectly safe and significantly easier on your wallet.

A “FREE” TURTLE? THINK AGAIN!

A brief look at the requirements and costs to keep a turtle

Safety is a real concern in aquariums where you are combining electrical equipment and water. An industrial GFI circuit breaker outlet should be used in these situations to prevent serious injury or death if something happens to the filter pump or the heater inside the aquarium.

I found that eBay can be a great place to look for cheaper pet supplies. The Petco store at Eubank and Lomas NE sold the PennPlax 700 canister filter for around \$100, so I saved money by using eBay, even with the \$9.00 shipping fee.

The one place where I did spend money was at The Bean Farm. Turtles need UVB to stay healthy, and experience has taught me that it's crucial to have a spare UV bulb on hand at all times -- which is why I bought two. The Powersun UV bulbs cost \$42.00 each. The lamp stand was a must, even at \$25.00, since the UV bulb must be suspended safely out of the way of the splashing water in the tank.

And of course, I needed something to put your tank on. I decided to use a Ready-to-Assemble television stand. It's rated to hold a 240-pound big-screen TV, and it has two drawers and a pair of open shelves to hold supplies. It looks nice and keeps everything I need for the enclosure in one place.

The hatchling turtles are now set up in my office and are thriving and growing steadily. All told, I spent nearly \$500 to properly house my Reeves' Turtles. You know, at \$50 each, I almost consider the hatchlings themselves a bargain!