

Setting up an indoor enclosure for box turtles

Step-by-step setup using a Rubbermaid™ tub

Text and photos by steph moore

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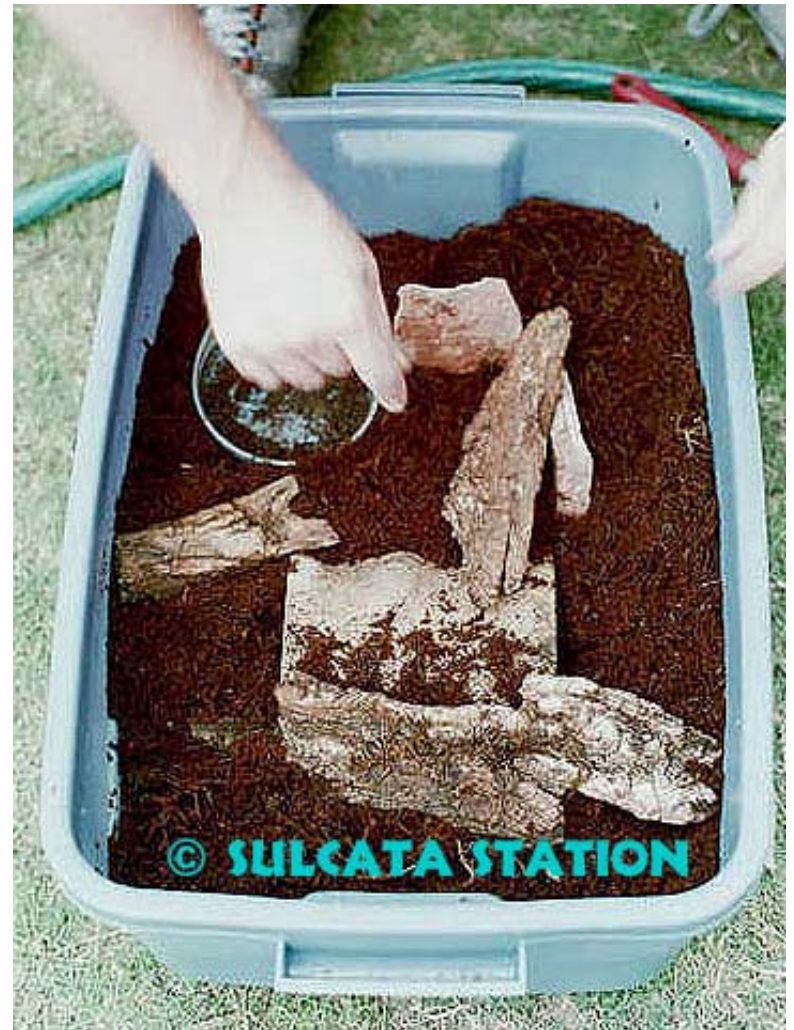
Why use a storage container?

- It's very simple to construct an indoor enclosure for turtles or smaller tortoises using a Rubbermaid® or Sterilite® storage container. These containers are preferable to glass aquariums because the floor space is larger and the ventilation is much better. They are also cheaper than glass aquariums, safer (no glass to get broken), and MUCH easier to clean!
- **What size container should you choose?**
 - **For one or two very small boxie hatchlings:** Use a smaller Roughneck® storage container from Rubbermaid (the 10 or 18-gallon sizes are good)
 - **For one or two adult box turtles OR numerous hatchling boxies OR hatchling tortoises:** Use a 50- to 55-gallon Rubbermaid storage container.
 - **When choosing a container, remember: Larger is always better!**

- **Recommended Substrate** for these enclosures is Bed-A-Beast® or Eco Earth®. Made from ground coconut shells (also called coconut coir), these are preferred to other substrates because they hold humidity. This is critical for hatchlings because they can become severely dehydrated very easily.
- Follow the label directions to re-hydrate the substrate. Fill the container with the re-hydrated substrate to a depth of 4 to 6 inches.



- Place decorative elements such as small flagstone pieces and strips of cottonwood or aspen bark to provide areas for climbing, hiding, and feeding.
- We also used a ceramic "fake log" to provide a big underground burrow.
- Don't forget to add a relatively large, shallow water bowl!



This was our final arrangement for our box turtle babies.



Some close-ups showing how we arranged things in our enclosure



Left: The wood provides areas for both climbing and hiding

Right: The cave opening is slightly excavated to allow entry



Sphagnum moss spread in a thin layer over everything, helps hold in humidity.
The moss absorbs water when we mist the enclosure daily.



More moss for the hatchlings to hide under.



Buzz, an ornate hatchling, and Ridge, a three-toed hatchling, love their box turtle food mix.



Additional Requirements for Indoor Turtles

Other things you must provide to help hatchling turtles or tortoises survive indoors:

- **UV lighting** - We strongly recommend the use of a combination UV-Heat bulb, because they provide necessary UV radiation. We use Mega-Ray® UV Bulbs, available online at ReptileUV.com. Their website also has good information about the need for UV radiation by captive reptiles. Turtles in particular need UV radiation to produce Vitamin D. This vitamin, along with supplemental calcium, is crucial to the proper development of bones and shell.
- **Water** - Change water bowls daily if possible, and scrub them out with white vinegar once a week to clean and disinfect them.
- **Food** - We feed our hatchling box turtles a homemade mixture of fruits and vegetables, supplemented with a tiny amount of canned Wellness® brand cat food. The recipe for our box turtle food mixture is available on the Rio Grande Turtle and Tortoise Club's website (www.rgttc.org).
- **Calcium supplementation** - Box turtles kept indoors need additional calcium as well as a UV radiation source to produce Vitamin D. Here are a few good sources for calcium:
 - **Cuttlebone** -- sold in pet stores for birds. Scrape the soft portion of the bone with a knife to make a powder; then sprinkle the powder lightly onto box turtles' food twice or three times per week. You can also shatter a cuttlebone using a rock or brick and then leave small pieces of the bone in the box turtles' pen. They will chew on it as they need it.
 - **Powdered limestone** -- this is typically sold in 50-pound bags as a supplement for chickens (it helps strengthen their egg shells) and it's very inexpensive to buy that way, but few people will use that much!
 - **Human calcium supplements** -- some people will grind up a Tums tablet or an Os-Cal tablet and use that for their turtles.

Sources and contact information

Sources:

- That Pet Place (www.thatpetplace.com) – substrate and miscellaneous reptile supplies
- ReptileUV.com (www.reptileUV.com) – Mega-Ray® Self-Ballasted 100 watt UVB bulbs
- ProExotics (www.tempgun.com) – infrared temperature gun, model PE-1
- Clark's Pet Emporium, Albuquerque, NM – miscellaneous reptile supplies

Questions? Contact me:

- tortoisegeek@yahoo.com
- sulcata.station@gmail.com

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