

BUILDING A HIBERNATION PIT FOR BOX TURTLES

Hibernation pits provide your box turtle a safe location in which to hibernate. We suggest putting **at least** one pit in your box turtle pen; more than one is always better.

MATERIALS LIST for EACH PIT:

- Standard 2" x 4" x 6" construction bricks – at least four per pit
- Sheet of ¾-inch plywood – cut to size that will completely cover each pit opening with at least 4 inches of overhang
- Peat moss, top soil, shredded leaves, chopped up hay, compost – you will mix these to refill each pit

TECHNIQUE:

1. Select a spot in your turtle pen that is easily accessible by your turtles. Corners and sunny inclines are good places.
2. Dig a pit that is at least 18 inches deep. The width and length of the pit can be varied to suit your pen size, location, and/or number of turtles.
3. Refill the pit to a depth of about 16 inches with a coarse mixture of peat moss, top soil, shredded leaves and twigs, chopped-up hay, and a bit of compost. Don't pack the mixture down – leave it loose and easily-dug
4. Water the compost mixture in the pit until it is moistened but not muddy. This will help keep your turtles maintain proper hydration.
5. Place at least four standard construction bricks at the edge of the pit, one at each side. (Use more bricks as necessary for larger pits.) Then lay a sheet of ¾-inch plywood atop the bricks. The turtles will use the gaps between the bricks to enter and exit the pit area as needed.
6. Spread hay (or straw) over the top of the plywood to provide insulation from both cold and heat. Hay may compact over time, so make sure you either replace it or add more over the top as needed.
7. After you're sure your turtles are down for the winter, cover the top and sides of the lid with additional hay, making sure that you seal all the openings between the bricks. If we have a dry winter, remember to open and water the pit once a month to keep it and your turtles hydrated.
8. When spring arrives and nighttime temps are warmer than 40°F, you can gradually remove some of the hay covering the openings. On sunny and warm spring days, you may want to open the lid all the way and let the sun warm the pit. Do a yard check around sunset to make sure any early-rising turtles get back to the pit so they won't freeze overnight. Close the lid after sunset and replace the hay as needed.

Hibernation Pit for Box Turtles -- Side View

