

Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: Stinkpot Turtles

Sternotherus odoratus is an adorably small species of aquatic turtle. They max out at 4 – 4.5 inches long. Stinkpots can be found from Florida to Ontario, and as far west as Texas and Wisconsin. The name “stinkpot” comes from the gross smell and liquid they are able to emit from glands on the corners of their plastron. They are also known as the common musk turtle. It is thought that they can live 30 – 50 years under proper care.

Enclosure: Size, Substrate, and Accessories

A minimum of a 20 gallon long (30” long by 12” wide by 12” high) should be provided for these turtles, but bigger is always better. A 40 gallon breeder (36” long by 18” wide by 18” high) is a much more ideal size for creating various water depths and basking areas for the turtle.

Sand or rocks that are large enough that the turtle is unable to attempt to eat them are ideal for substrates. Large rock is generally better as it will be easier to clean. It also won't build up nitrate pockets as easily as sand. Substrate will also provide the turtle with some grip as it walks along the bottom of the aquarium.

Stinkpot turtles inhabit slow flowing streams and rivers, ponds, lakes, and swamps. To replicate this environment, the water should be shallow enough that the turtle can just touch the bottom, but a slope can be created so that there is a depth of up to two feet. The turtle should also be able to get out of the water and bask using either a rock, log, or turtle platform. Rocks, caves, and logs can also be submerged to give the turtle resting spots while they swim. Plants should also be added for added security. The turtle may consume some live plants, so research what you put in first as a precaution. Live plants may also require specialized lighting, depending on the type.

Lighting and Heat

A basking area with a temperature of 90 – 100 F (32.2 – 37.7 C) should be provided, with an air temperature of around 80 F (26.6 C). This is easily achieved using a daylight basking bulb. The water should be maintained between 72 – 80 F (22.2 – 26.6 C). If needed, an aquarium heater can be used to warm the water. A proper thermometer should always be used to measure the temperature. Too hot, and the animal could overheat. Too cold, and they won't grow properly or won't digest properly. Digital is preferred, since it is more accurate.

A 5.0 UVB light (sometimes labeled as UVB 100) should be provided. This type of lighting is essential in maintaining proper vitamin D3 levels, which allows them to properly absorb and metabolize calcium, regulates the immune system, and promotes proper organ development. Since these lights are aren't quite the same as the sun, providing a calcium with added D3 once in a while is beneficial. UVB lights should be replaced every 6 – 12 months.

All visible lighting should be turned off at night to provide the animal with a proper daytime/nighttime cycle.

Diet and Supplements

Stinkpots will consume snails, mollusks, crayfish, shrimp, crickets, mealworms, earthworms, fish, shrimp, and bloodworms. They may also consume plant matter, such as elodea species and duckweed. Snails, shrimp, and fish can be kept with the turtle to help keep them fed, and will allow the turtle to hunt naturally. Guppies and platies make great feeder fish choices as they are small enough to be eaten, aren't too fatty, don't contain thiaminase (an enzyme that blocks vitamin B1 absorption, which can lead to deficiencies down the road), and



are easily digestible. One rule of thumb for feeding is as much food as will fit inside the turtles head if it were hollow, once a day. All feeder insects should be gut loaded 1 – 24 hours before being fed. Dusting prey with calcium can be tricky with aquatic animals, so ensure that the gut load is calcium rich. Providing cuttle bone will also give them a calcium source and help keep their beaks trim.

Filtration and Water Quality

It is important to cycle the aquarium before introducing the turtle. Cycling is the process of growing bacteria that will help deal with the waste from the turtle and any other tank mates. This process can take 4 – 8 weeks to complete. Adding beneficial bacteria to the aquarium will help with this process. As mentioned before, parts of the water should be shallow enough that the turtle can stretch its legs and reach the bottom, but can go as deep as 2 feet in some areas. The water should also be filtered, using a quality, three stage filter, not a single insert filter. The Fluval U series is a good choice for this, as it will sit inside the aquarium so no additional space is needed for the filter, and has a spray bar function to create a gentle flow.

Regular water changes and filter maintenance are an absolute must. Once a week, 10 – 25% of the water should be changed out. During this time, the gravel can also be cleaned using a gravel vacuum, and algae can be removed from the sides. Once a month, the filter media and motor needs to be checked and maintained. Always consult your filter manual for specific instructions on how to maintain the filter. Never do a water change and clean the filter on the same day.

An aquarium test kit can be used to monitor the water quality. The ammonia and nitrite should always be 0 ppm, the nitrate should be no more than 40 ppm, and the pH should be 7.0.

Cohabitation

Males should never be housed together as they will fight. Females can sometimes be housed together, if a larger tank with more hiding spots is provided. Male/female groups should be avoided unless there is the intention to breed, and the means to raise and, if needed, keep all the babies. The male should still have his own tank to return to so that the females may have a break from the stress of breeding.

Sexing

Stinkpots will not be sexable until 4 – 5 years old. Males are slightly larger and typically have a longer, thicker tail than females.

Checklist of Supplies

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| ✓ 20 – 40 gallon aquarium | ✓ Beneficial Bacteria |
| ✓ Lid for enclosure | ✓ Aquarium test kit |
| ✓ Substrate | ✓ Insect keeper |
| ✓ Heat lamp and bulb | ✓ Insect diet |
| ✓ Aquarium heater | ✓ Insect gut load |
| ✓ UVB bulb and fixture | ✓ Basking area |
| ✓ Filter | ✓ Rocks and logs for the aquarium bottom |
| ✓ 2 Thermometers (one for the basking area and one for the water) | ✓ Plants |
| ✓ Dechlorinator | |

