

Brumation



This Q-Tip barrier is useful in spring to know when your tortoise has emerged

What is brumation?

- Definition: Brumation is winter dormancy in cold-blooded animals with backbones like reptiles and amphibians
- In late September and October, tortoises undergo physiological changes that are independent of body temperature
- Greatly reduced metabolism-Its heart rate and breathing slow dramatically
- The tortoise is programmed to sleep and not to eat

Why do tortoises brumate?

- It's their adaptation to the cold
- They need a body temperature of 85 degrees to fulfill tortoise functions like looking for food, metabolizing the food, or mating
- When it's cold, they need another strategy – brumation
- Sulcata and Leopard tortoises , from warmer climates, do not brumate

Where should my tortoise brumate?

- In its burrow
- Temperature needs to be between 35 and 55 degrees for optimum brumation
- A snug, well-insulated burrow allows the tortoise to:
 - Retain most of its moisture
 - Stay the right temperature so it does not use up its resources

What happens if my tortoise brumates in the closet or under the bed?

- It does a slow cook all winter, losing moisture and precious calories
- A large tortoise can afford the losses more than a small one that might die
- If it has survived in the past, it will probably be okay again

How will I know that my tortoise is ready to brumate?

- Your tortoise will decide when its time
- It will come out less and less often
- It will eat less and less

What can I do while my tortoise is brumating?

- Days of gentle rain may produce flooding
- Check inside of burrow for flooding
 - Use a mirror during the day
 - Use a flashlight at night
- If there's water inside burrow, dig it up!
- Tortoise can hold its breath for several hours
- Remove litter near burrow opening

What can I do while my tortoise is brumating?

- Cover the burrow in a big rainstorm-remove immediately afterward to avoid greenhouse effect



What if the burrow collapses?

- If the burrow collapses, dig it up!
- Leave it open to dry (takes a long time to dry)
- When dry, put the burrow back together—or build a new one
- Put the tortoise back in the burrow



Medical considerations

- If a tortoise shows signs of URDS (drippy noise) in fall:
 - It may be too late in the season to treat it
 - Symptoms may disappear during brumation
- If your tortoise is coming out continually during winter, it is probably sick and needs a trip to the vet
- A very sick tortoise may need to be kept awake

Should I feed my tortoise if it emerges early?

- No. It's still very cold and can't metabolize the food
- It may come out when it rains, too, even if it's quite cold. That's normal. Tortoises survive by getting rain when they can.
- Let the tortoise go back in the burrow on its own

Fall Farewell

- Soak tortoise
- May eat lots or not much at all
- Mark day last seen



Spring Welcome

- Emergence: Late February to April or May
- Tortoise comes out to bask
- Soak tortoise in water after a few days
- May come out and stay out on patio or under a bush. Outside temp is warmer than in burrow
- Offer MegaDiet when browsing begins
- And enjoy!

