

Guidelines to Creating a Backyard Habitat & Care for Adoption

Welcome to the Jan. 23 Zoom meeting. Glad you are here!!!

We will start promptly at 9AM. Would appreciate everyone putting themselves on mute until the end of the presentation when we can take questions.

FYI - this presentation should take approximately 45 minutes for us to cover.



Creating a Backyard Habitat & Care



Overview

Charles Born, Volunteer/Board Member

AGENDA

- Origin and characteristics
- Seasonal behavior
- Adoption & creating a safe habitat
- Review and next steps



How Do I Adopt A Tortoise?

- Fill out our online Adoption Application!
Most important!

- One tortoise per household to avoid breeding/ fighting
- \$75 adoption fee when tortoise is adopted!



Email / Important Links

Thank you for your interest in adopting a desert tortoise! With recent events, we have scheduled online workshops through Zoom (instead of performing on-site yard consultations). <https://tortoisegroup.org/events/>

Step 1) Attend online adoption workshop

Step 2) Build your backyard habitat

Step 3) Send photos to Tortoise Group to confirm completion of habitat

IMPORTANT LINKS

Here are links to our care sheets about each feature of a safe tortoise habitat. The complete list of our care sheets can be found at: <http://tortoisegroup.org/care/care-sheets/>

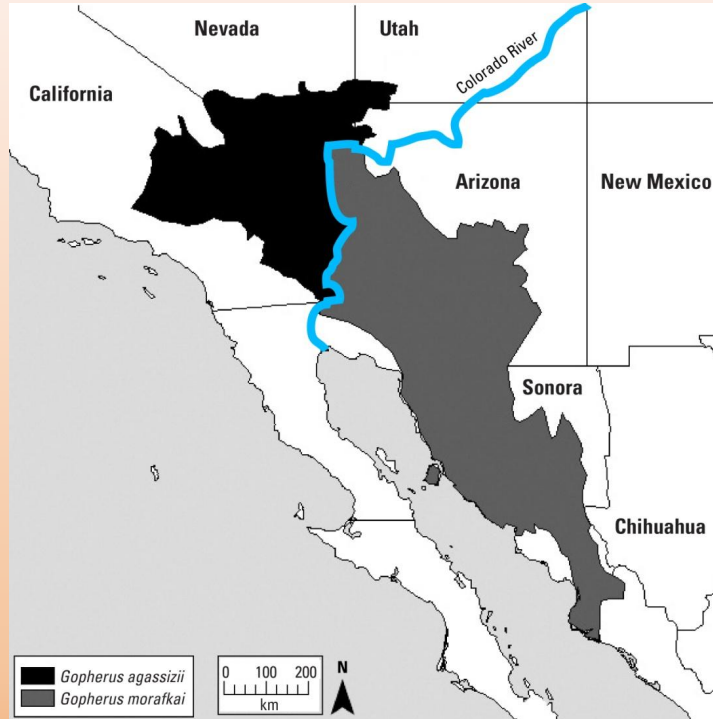
- [Plants to Grow for Tortoises](#)
- [Grassland Tortoise Food and Tortoise Diet](#)
- [Above Ground Burrow](#)
- [Underground Burrow](#)
- [Gate Barrier Construction](#)

Chat (dirt) can be ordered from Vista Landscaping Centers or Star Nursery.

Range of *Gopherus agassizii* and *Gopherus morafkai*

Mojave Desert Tortoise
Go-pher-us Ag-a-ssi-zi-i.

Sonoran Desert Tortoise
Gopherus Mor-af-kai



Four species of tortoises occur in the United States and a fifth is found in Mexico.

Desert (Mojave) Tortoise (*Gopherus [Xerobates] agassizii*)

Sonoran Tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*)

Bolson Tortoise (*Gopherus flavomarginatus*) (Mexico)

Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) (Florida)

Texas Tortoise (*Gopherus [Xerobates] berlandieri*) (Texas)

Populations separated into Mojave and Sonoran deserts by the Colorado River.

The Original Environmentalist

· **Extremely adaptable**

- Can survive in a climate where temperatures can exceed 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

· **No need for air conditioning - they stay cool using the earth itself.**

- By digging burrows they can escape the heat of the summer, the cold of winter, and to protect themselves from predators.

· **Ultimate Water Conservationists**

- Can survive a year or more without water. In the spring they obtain water mostly from the moist grass and other vegetation they eat.

· **The original reservoir builders**

- Dig catchment basins in the dirt of the Mojave to capture what little rainfall there is in the desert. When it rains they go to these basins to obtain water.

·

The Original Environmentalists

· **Energy conservationists**

· Tortoises conserve energy. They take time to enjoy life in ways meaningful to them – maybe we can learn from them. This helps them maintain water when the temperature is hot and survive the extremely cold winters. In fact they hibernate during winters.

· **Own conservation tools.**

· Built for digging, they dig burrows in order to survive. Their front limbs have flat claw-like scales which are perfect for this purpose.

· **Smart land developers**

· Prefers to live where the soil is ideal for digging burrows. This soil quality influences the density of desert tortoise populations.

· **Threatened**

· Their numbers are declining as our grow. But in a world dealing with global warming desert tortoises can survive in a climate where temperatures can exceed 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Can we?

Seasonal Activity is Temperature Dependent

- **Spring & fall** – high activity, eating, exploring
- **Hot summer** - stay in burrow to escape heat, active early morning/evenings
- **Winter** - brumate from about mid-late October to mid-late March



Creating a Safe Habitat

- Tortoise must live outside!
- Area of 600 square feet preferred
- Yard must be escape proof
- Burrow -must be dry
- Shaded water dish
- Plants for browsing
- Safety
 - Gate barrier
 - No other tortoise hazards
 - Fence that tortoise cannot see through



Shelter



Typical burrow of a wild tortoise

Shelter – The Burrow

- Tortoise spends a lot of time in the burrow
- Needs to be snug with little air circulation
- No plastic on top! Any type of plastic layer creates a greenhouse effect



- Insulated (1 ft of dirt)
- No flooding
- Tortoise CANNOT continue to dig (completely enclosed)

Keeping your burrow snug



- Reduces air circulation
- Keeps burrow cool in the summer and warm in the winter
- In winter conserves valuable moisture



Aboveground burrow design – Care Sheet

Flooding is near impossible = More chat (dirt) is required for insulation



Underground burrow design – Care Sheet

Requires less chat (dirt) to be bought More physical labor (digging)

Northern Nevada Design



Food



Vegetarians- Graze like a cow on the small flowers and grasses in the desert. There is no fruit in the desert. Remember that.

Fact- Wild tortoise may only eat 6 weeks out of the year!!-

Food – Healthy tortoise diet

- Promote browsing on a variety of plants
- Feed Grassland brand supplemental tortoise food with high fiber, low protein- (1-3 times/week or a little amount every day)
- **NO** Lettuce
- **NO** fruits or vegetables



Plants & more plants

Globe mallow



Mexican evening primrose



Food- Browsing & Plants

Dandelion



Petunia



Food - Browsing

Hollyhock



Spineless cactus



Browsing - The Wonderful Grape



Using Smile.Amazon.Com

You can purchase Grassland Tortoise Food on smile.amazon.com. Amazon will donate a portion of your purchase to Tortoise Group if you select us as recipient.

- [Plants to Grow for Tortoises](#)
- [Grassland Tortoise Food and Tortoise Diet](#)



Water



Tortoises take in water through their mouth, nose, skin, and cloaca! And hold 1 Liter for over a year.

Seem to sense coming summer rains; move to low areas to secure drinking water. (Averill-Murray 2002)

Water dish



A shallow, shaded, covered water dish large enough to sit in for a good soak and/or drink! They will often drink for 20-30 minutes

Water



Urine is made up of fluid and urate salts.

Gate barrier

Tortoises are
great escape
artists!



Great precaution to ensure you do not lose your tortoise! If they can see out, they try to get out! (Digging and climbing)

Enclosure/barrier

- 18" Solid Barrier
- Tortoise cannot see through



[Marking Your Tortoise \(tortoisegroup.org\)](http://tortoisegroup.org)

For ninja tortoises that escape - consider tagging.

Hazards

- Areas they may get stuck, flip over, or try to climb
- Large drop-offs, steps
- Unfenced pool, pond
- Open gate
- Two male tortoises usually fight, opposite sexes mate
Separate tortoises!
- Debris: balloons, colorful plastic bits, plastic bags

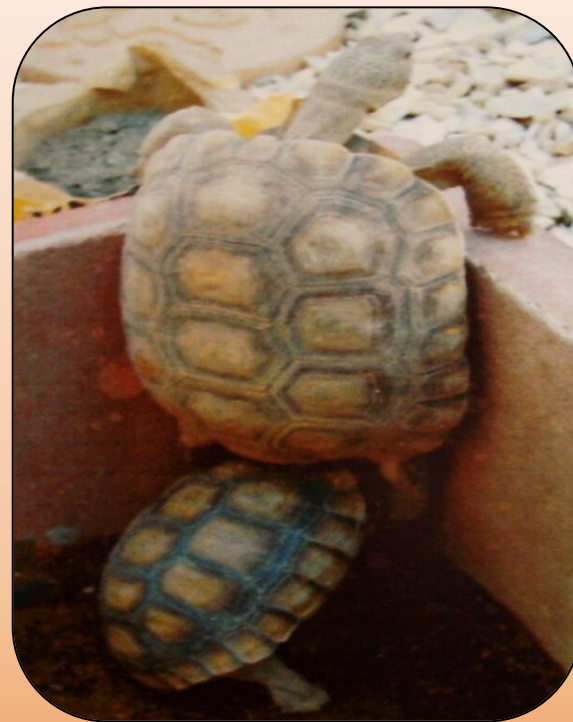


Ninja Tortoise Hazards

Places to get stuck



Climbing out



Hazards



The bright colors of litter can be mistaken as food and attracts predators. Swallowed litter can kill.

Supervise with other pets!



<https://tortoisegroup.org/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/sheet2-sexing-copy.pdf>

Burrow



Plants



Water Dish



Barrier



Thank you! charlesborn@tortoisegroup.org

- Send me an email after this session and let me know if N or S Nevada
- Keep in touch and send me photos of your 4 aspects of habitat we covered - burrow, plants, water and barriers
 - Once approved - pay adoption fee and transfer arranged

FYI - Vets: Dr. Francher,
Creature Comforts

FYI Contractor for hire:
Victor, Aloha Norma Landscaping
702-502-1040

