Turtles as Pets: Is a Turtle the Best Pet for Me?

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Getting a pet is always a very important decision and one that should be made only when you are aware of what having this pet will entail. What type of turtle, sources of turtles, and estimates of the time and money it will take to properly care for the turtle are all important considerations. But before you go out and buy a turtle you need to ask yourself some very important questions.

What is the cost and time committment?

Turtles and tortoises are very complex organisms and they have a very specialized set of needs. If a turtle owner does not provide these specialized needs, then these animals will lead a very poor quality of life and die a premature death. While there are many turtle owners out there that provide an excellent environment for their captive turtles, there are many that do not. One of the first questions that you have to ask yourself is why do you want a turtle or tortoise. While there are many reasons why we take animals as pets, some of them are not very good ones, and completely fail to take the welfare of the animal into account. Obtaining a turtle or tortoise is a very important decision, and much thought and planning should go into the decision. Some things to consider before you obtain a tortoise are:

- The initial expense of purchasing a turtle or tortoise is by far the cheapest part of owning a turtle. To properly care for a turtle, you will need to provide appropriate housing, food, vitamins, bedding, temperature, humidity, and veterinary care, which can total hundreds of dollars a year. Are you willing to invest that kind of money?
- Turtles can live for a very long time, often 25 years or longer. Are you prepared to care for this animal for its entire life?
- Turtles require clean, fresh water and bedding. Are you prepared to spend time each and every day cleaning and caring for your turtle? You should expect to spend at least half an hour each day caring for the turtle.
- When you travel, your turtle will still require daily care, and cannot be left to fend for itself. Will you be able to arrange for its care in such situations?
- Most turtles and tortoises hibernate from 10 to 20 weeks. Are you prepared to provide the correct hibernating environment and care for your turtle?
- To properly care for a turtle or tortoise, you need to provide fresh fruits and vegetables or insects or mice. Are you ready to deal with the extra work this entails?

What can I expect from a turtle?

- Turtles do not interact with or particularly like humans. Are you prepared to have a pet that does not interact with you other than at feeding time?
- Turtles and tortoises are an interesting novelty to children, but soon lose their charm. Turtles are not recommended as suitable pets for most children because of the risk of certain diseases, including *Salmonella*. Are you willing to take the proper precautions to protect yourself and your family?

What kind of turtle should I get?

If you are prepared to provide excellent nutrition, ample and adequate housing, and a lifetime of caring and husbandry to your turtle, then the next step is to research the different species available. There are major differences between turtles, tortoises, and terrapins. Choose a species that fits your lifestyle and your environmental niche. For example, does it really make sense to have a tropical species from the jungle of South America living in the Northwoods of Wisconsin? Pick a species that needs an environment similar to the one where you live, and then you can provide the best outdoor as well as indoor housing and nutrition.

Where should I get a turtle?

If you are confident that you understand all the above requirements for ownership, then you should consider one more important factor before you choose a turtle or tortoise as a pet, and that is, where did it come from? This question does not pertain to whether it was from a pet store or private sale, but rather did it come from the wild (wild-caught), or was it hatched from a captive-raised and bred turtle. If it was hatched and reared in captivity that is great; if it was captured from the wild, then you might want to rethink your decision.

Most people who get a turtle or tortoise as a pet have no idea where it came from. They would be shocked to know that many of them are taken out of the wild. Before you purchase a turtle or tortoise, insist that there is proof that it has been captive-bred and raised. If the seller cannot provide this proof, then assume the turtle was wild-caught and look elsewhere. Breeders that provide good housing, nutrition, and controlled breeding programs are much more likely to provide healthy species and good husbandry information. Do yourself and turtles a huge favor and never purchase a wild-caught turtle.

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Conclusion

If you are well-informed, choose the right type of turtle for you, obtain it from a reputable source, and are willing to commit the time and money to care of it, you and your new turtle can live a long and happy life together.

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