



LET'S TALK ABOUT  
**COMPLETE**  
**CARE GUIDE**

A TENREC CARE  
GUIDE

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By Happy Quills

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## CHAPTER 1

# HOUSING/ENCLOSURE

The most recommended form of housing is a vivarium, as it is easier to keep temperatures consistently warm, with branches inside to imitate their natural environment. A 48" x 18" x 18" vivarium is the minimum size to aim for and would be sufficient for a pair, something smaller would not be suitable as in the warmer seasons they can be very active, so they need plenty of space. Multi-level vivariums are used with success too.

Due to tenrecs being prey animals, they do not like open space and prefer cluttered space which helps them feel more safe and secure. The floor of the enclosure needs to be cage three quarters full of hides, logs, branches, tunnels, etc to provide lots of places for them to hide. Tenrecs must have at least one hide in their enclosure. Depending on the size of the enclosure, and how many levels you have, you may need to add multiple hides. You can use wood hides, plastic hides, hay hides, snuggle sacks and other fleece bags, fleece made hides, etc. Reptile Bark can make great hides and have the benefit of being replicating their natural environment. Coconut shell hides are also usually a hit as they like to squeeze themselves in (be warned that getting them out of these is tricky). Tenrecs are a semi arboreal animal who live on the trees primarily when out in Madagascar, therefore should have lots of things to climb on, over, in and up. Items they really enjoy are branches, reptile bark, cork tubes, stumps and even ropes. Although Tenrecs are climbers, they are not always the best, thankfully when they fall they have the ability to bounce and walk away. Typically, tenrecs will pick a specific corner or area of their enclosure in which to go to the toilet.

## CHAPTER 2

# SUBSTRATE/BEDDING

There are many substrates that can be used. Most owners use ornamental bark (small chunks) aspen or asubiose for the base of the enclosure. The aspen is soft and absorbs any urine, it can be burrowed into, and if accidentally eaten, is quickly spat out. It even smells pleasant. Other options that can be used are jungle earth and beech chips. A lot depends on how natural you want your set up to be. DO NOT USE cedar bedding as the oils are toxic in small animals, and are known to cause respiratory illness and even death. Popular bedding options are small pet paper bedding, aspen wood shavings, coco peat/loose coconut fiber, and reptile wood chips/mulch. All substrate should be frozen for a minimum for 24 hours and then thawed before use to kill off any possible mites in it. Fleece/fabric liners can also be used, and extra fleece strips can be provided as tenrecs enjoy burrowing. Sand is not a suitable substrate and can dry your tenrecs skin out, with that in mind keep the sand just for the sand baths.

## CHAPTER 3

# ENRICHMENT

PVC pipes make great tunnels for Tenrecs. They need to be at least 3" PVC pipes, bigger is fine but anything smaller and most tenrecs will not fit in them and could get stuck. Tenrecs like a variety of tunnels, be it straight, bendy, t-shaped, plastic or wood, all make a Tenrec happy. A wheel should also be available, mesh wheels are popular for tenrecs, a mesh wheel is considered safe as tenrecs are not in danger of breaking legs. Wheels should be at least 10-12 inches wide. Having a sand bath in their enclosure is important. Tenrecs are very clean animals, both in terms of grooming and their living habits. This means they do not usually require much cleaning, and do not have to be bathed ever.

## CHAPTER 4

# CLIMBING ACCESSORIES

Tenrecs require lots of climbing accessories so that they can get the exercise they need. Items like wood logs and branches (both real wood and fake are okay) are needed throughout the cage. Make sure the wood you use is untreated and is pet safe. It is best to stick to pet store bought wood for reptiles and birds/ wood labeled for reptiles and birds because that is pet safe. Real wood has the advantage of keeping your Tenrecs nails at the right length (they rarely need them trimmed). However, if you chose to use fake branches in their enclosure then please make sure that they are thick enough to hold a tenrecs weight, many are sold to use for lighter weight reptiles.

## CHAPTER 5

# CAGE WALL AND FLOOR ACCESSORIES

Optional but recommended, is the use of fake vines and fake plants to add clutter to the cage walls and floor to help make the tenrec feel more secure in their cage.

## CHAPTER 6

# HEAT SOURCE

Temperature should be kept at 24 degrees all year round. Some people turn the temperature down for torpor to 22 degrees, however tenrecs will still go into torpor even if kept at a constant temperature. The choice is yours. It is almost impossible, and definitely not advised, to prevent torpor as no one really knows how detrimental this is to their health. The enclosure should have a 60W-100W ceramic heat emitter bulb (CHE bulb) with a cage fitted, which is attached to a pulse proportional thermostat so you can ensure that the temperature is kept consistent.

## CHAPTER 7

# LIGHT SOURCE

Tenrecs need a UVB light during the day to prevent MBD. A UVB shade dweller Arcadia mini is recommended for up to four hours a day..

## CHAPTER 8

# DIET

Tenrecs are insectivores so this should form the majority of their diet. Items such as crickets, earthworms, locusts, silk worms, mealworms, Morio worms, roaches, snails and waxworms. Tenrecs are small but they can eat a lot of bugs for their size. The remaining 10% of their diet should consist of fruit and veg, although some tenrecs are very fussy and do not eat these. A good way of getting tenrecs to get the benefits of fruit/veg is to gut load your insects before feeding. Tenrecs should be fed 8-10 large morio worms daily or 10-15 large mealworms or the equivalent of other smaller insects such as crickets etc. Other items that can be offered include fruit yoghurt, hard-boiled egg, scrambled egg (no milk or butter) , mince (raw and cooked ), plain cooked chicken /turkey, pinkies and day-old chicks. All food, apart from insects, should be cut into small pieces, and any seeds should be removed. Tenrecs can be fussy so may not eat all foods given. It is important to supply a calcium supplement, such as Nutrobal, which can be done by dusting live food with the powder and then tong-feeding them. A cuttlefish placed in their enclosure is also good as it supplies calcium, they either nibble on it or anoint on it, either way it helps increase their calcium levels and helps to prevent MBD (see below).

All tenrecs should be offered a small bowl of kibble in their enclosure . The best one, as it is small in size, is Royal Canin mother & baby cat dry biscuits (kibble). This, alongside insects, gives them a balance of the vitamins and minerals they need. They eat very small amounts of kibble, which is totally normal as is a small percentage of their diet. Mazuri insectivore diet can be added to the kibble, it is recommended that a base of insectivore mix is left in the bowl to be nibbled on between insect feeds. Insectivore diet is also good during torpor as they are not eating insects but still get the nutrients. A small bowl will last several days so do not add too much as it will go stale.

As with all animals, fresh water should be provided at all times. Tenrecs for the most part are pretty hardy healthy animals & don't seem to experience many ailments like other small pets do. One health condition that tenrecs are prone to is Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD). MBD are disorders of bone strength usually caused by abnormalities of minerals (such as calcium or phosphorus), vitamin D, bone mass or bone structure. With tenrecs the MBD is caused by a lack of calcium/calcium deficiency. The way to prevent this is to make sure at least once a week you are adding reptile calcium powder with D3, but you want it to be phosphorus free because they do not usually have an issue with needing phosphorus. If your tenrec does not get much natural sunlight, then you can also provide your tenrec with a tube UVB bulb to help with their calcium absorption, the UV should be a shade dweller. The D3 in the calcium powder needs UVB to be activated. We also suggest using Smart Water, which is a kind of bottled water, because it has added calcium in it so it is just a good easy extra step to get calcium in them. Smart Water tastes like normal water, so it is pretty easy to get them to drink it. Tenrecs are not prone to cancers, while they can get cancer it is rare for them to. MBD is the most common health condition they can get, so just make sure you are giving them added calcium and that will help decrease their chances of having it. If you notice them having issues walking/moving around,

their paws looking strange, etc please take them to the vet because those are signs of MBD. Other ways to help calcium levels are to add Zolcal liquid calcium to their water and add calcium dust to their sand baths weekly.

If you have a multi-level enclosure it is recommended putting food and water on each level in case they do not want to go all the way up or down the cage daily to get to food and water, that way they will never be far from it.

## CHAPTER 9

# BATHING AND NAILS

Tenrecs do not need water baths with soap, they should instead be given sand baths in their enclosure and allowed to self bathe. Tenrecs use the sand to exfoliate their skin to keep it healthy. They bathe by grabbing sand with their front paws, wetting it with their saliva, then scrubbing it onto their face, head, back, etc. You want to use a container to put the sand in so they can climb into it to sand bathe & sand won't go everywhere in the enclosure. The container should be large enough for them to easily move around in. You cannot use any old sand, they need clean sand safe for animals, reptile sand (never calcium/calc sand, it can be fatal if they ingest any of it because it clumps when wet and will cause an impaction inside of them), or hamster/chinchilla sand (no chinchilla dust, it is too fine & could harm their lungs, eyes, & ears).

Tenrec nails are long and need to be a good length so that they are able to grip and climb. They do not usually need their nails trimmed unless they are not able to wear their nails down on wood while climbing, as this is how they would wear their nails down in the wild. You should only trim their nails a little if you notice their nails starting to flop over when they walk or they are getting close to curling into their feet. Under no circumstances should their nails be cut short as they will be unable to climb properly and may injure themselves from falling. If you need to trim their nails, use regular human nail clippers, baby nail clippers, or cuticle clippers.

## CHAPTER 10

# METHODS FOR SEXING TENRECS

Tenrec owners and especially first time owners often wonder how they can sex their tenrec as they do not have regular genitals to determine their sexes. In this article we provide a few options to help the matter, because there are a few methods!

## CLOACA

First off, we will start at the beginning: why can't you tell a tenrec's sex by their genitals? Well, because they don't have them. At least not in the usual way in mammals where males have a penis and females have a vulva. Tenrecs are an odd bunch and definitely in this regard. Both sexes have cloacas. This means they have one single cavity for all purposes: to urinate, to excrete, to breed and to birth. The single canal is linked to all inside organs responsible for these functions, so telling a tenrec's sex by the cloaca is impossible. But that doesn't mean you can't tell their sex at all.

# HEADSHAPE

Though this is very much dependent on lineage and body type, the widely accepted theory is that males have a slightly wider head shape than females, with more distance between their eyes. Though this method is certainly not reliable in any way, it might help when using sexing methods that don't require a vet.

# EYE DISCHARGE

Male tenrecs get white discharge every now and then. This is correlated to mating season, but it also happens in other situations sometimes, like stress or territorial behavior. It's a great way to tell male and female apart, but by the time this happens, males are already sexually productive. The method is also very much flawed, because not all males actually discharge through their eyes and some females can also produce discharge. It is rare for a female to do so, but it is possible! This method is often used by pet owners of tenrecs who don't mind if their tenrec is a male or female, because they do not plan on breeding them and the tenrecs are housed alone.

# MANUALLY EXPRESSING THE PHALLUS

Yes, the outside of a cloaca is the same in both sexes. But since the cloaca is connected to all organs responsible for urinating, excreting, breeding and birthing, there are some things you can do to determine the sex of a tenrec. Males have a phallus inside their cloaca, which can be manually pushed out to determine their sex. When you press on the belly above the cloaca and push downwards, the phallus or penis of the male tenrec should be pressed out of the cloaca. Females do not have a phallus and thus, the method seems quite simple. A phallus means that the tenrec is male and no phallus would mean the tenrec is female. Right? Well, that's not always the case, though it is a trustworthy method! But sometimes males just have a small phallus that doesn't quite reach the end of the cloaca. Those males can still produce offspring and you might feel the phallus being there under the skin even if it's not visible. So pay attention not only to what you see, but also to what you feel. This method is often used in young tenrecs by breeders to determine sex before selling them and before turning to more expensive methods.

# SCANS OR ECHOES

Some owners, especially breeders, want to be more certain about the tenrec's sex and turn to a vet's assistance. Vets differ in their methods for this one but scans and echoes can show the inside of the cloaca. With these methods, you can visible see if there is a phallus inside the cloaca, making the tenrec male or female. This is a very trustworthy method and often used before turning to DNA testing.

# DNA TESTING

A lot of breeders in the community worldwide, use DNA testing to have absolute certainty of the tenrec's sex. These DNA tests are taken by swabbing the saliva of the tenrec and testing it for the ZFX-ZFY genes, determining if the tenrec is male.

Genomia is the most used lab to do these tests as they've determined a specific SRY-marker identifying male gender in the representatives of families Tenrec, Setifer, Echinops and Hemicentetes. Meaning, they can test DNA to see if a tenrec has this specific gene. If they do, they are considered male, if they do not, they are considered female. Though this method is considered the most trustworthy option, it does not provide a 100% certainty. Because of the limited research done on hedgehogs and tenrecs, the test is based on one specific gene and it does not consider any chromosomal mutations limiting males from ever becoming productive or point out intersex tenrecs. These instances are very rare though.