

TURTLE FACTS



The top of the shell is called the CARAPACE.



The bottom of the shell is called the PLASTRON.

The shell is made up of large, hard scales called SCUTES.

All turtles have a shell. Each shell has a top, called a CARAPACE, and a bottom, called a PLASTRON. The shell is made up of large, hard scales called SCUTES. Most turtles have 13 scutes on the top shell. The top shell can come in many shapes, colors, and sizes. The bottom shell also varies in size and color. In some turtles, the bottom shell has one or two hinges that allow it to open and shut. Turtles cannot climb out or be pulled out of their shells. The shell is part of the turtle's skeleton.

Turtles do not have teeth. They have a hard, sometimes sharp "beak" that they use to eat their food. Turtles eat lots of different kinds of food. Some turtles eat only plants. They are called HERBIVORES. Some turtles eat only animals. They are called CARNIVORES. Many turtles eat both plants and animals. They are called OMNIVORES. The kind of turtle and where it lives determine what the turtle will eat.

A turtle's skin is dry and scaly. Because turtles are reptiles, they shed their skin when they grow. Some water turtles spend a lot of time BASKING in the sun and even shed their scutes. This helps them stay clean and healthy.

Turtles also have claws on their feet. Water turtles have webbing between their toes to help them swim. Land turtles have no webbing, so their claws can help them walk on dry land.

Turtles, including the eastern box turtle (left), do not have teeth. They have a hard "beak" that they use to eat their food.



All turtles lay eggs. Turtle eggs are not like bird eggs. Some eggs are round, while others are elongated or oval. The shell can be soft, thin, leathery, or hard. The female turtle digs a hole, lays the eggs, and then carefully covers them with soil. She then leaves them to incubate and hatch on their own. Some eggs hatch in the summer and some hatch in the fall. Baby turtles are very small—only a half-inch to one inch long. Sometimes people find turtle eggs in their flower beds and mulch piles. Remember that turtle eggs are protected by law and should not be moved or disturbed.

Since a turtle is a reptile, it is "cold-blooded," or ECTOTHERMIC. This means that the turtle's body temperature changes with the outside temperature. This is why you often see water turtles basking on logs out of the water. They are soaking up the sun's rays to help their body temperature rise. If they get too hot, back in the water they go! Land turtles also bask in the sunshine to get warm. If they get too hot, they seek a cooler, shady spot or damp area.

In the winter, turtles need to hibernate. They go underground, bury themselves in the mud, or stay under the water until the spring and warmer weather arrives.

Did you know that some turtles can live to be over 100 years old? They live that long when they are left alone in nature and can find food, water, and good places to live.

Some people think it is a good idea to have a turtle as a pet. Turtles do not make good pets because they like to make a mess! If you don't clean their aquariums everyday, they start to smell. In addition, since they can live a very long time, it is a very big job to try and take care of a turtle.

People who study turtles, called HERPETOLOGISTS, have found that most turtles kept as pets and then let go into the wild will die very shortly after they are released.



All turtles lay eggs. Some eggs are round, like snapping turtle eggs, while others are elongated or oval.



Baby turtles, such as the bog turtle, are very small—only a half-inch to one inch long.



Turtles are "cold-blooded," or ECTOTHERMIC. The eastern painted turtle as well as other turtles bask in the sunshine to get warm.