

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR RED-EARED SLIDER

We regret that we cannot take any sliders at this time. Each year we're asked to take in over 100 sliders, and we just don't have the room to take any more. Sliders are the most frequently surrendered or abandoned pet turtle, due to their eventual large adult size, quick rate of growth, and inexpensive sale price. They're also one of the hardest turtles to place for the same reasons. There are no local sanctuaries for sliders, and since they aren't native, the various park systems cannot include them in displays. We get weekly requests from states all over the United States because the problem exists across the country, and we are unaware of any rescues that will take them.

However, we have several suggestions for helping in the care of your pet, if this could help you keep it, or at least keep it until a suitable home is found. If you have a backyard, consider adding a pond in the spring or summer. Sliders can live year-round in a fenced-in pond dug below frost level, typically of 300 gallons or more. A turtle must be added to a pond for the first time from mid-May to mid-September, when the water is warm enough for the turtle to acclimate to being outside. There are many websites and books on ponding that can help you create an outdoor habitat for your pet. The area MUST be fenced in, as it is illegal to release a slider to native waters, and sliders can leave a pond if precautions aren't taken. You can occasionally find free ponding supplies at www.freecycle.org or www.craigslist.org

If you are having trouble keeping your tank clean, consider purchasing a Python siphon. This accessory connects to almost any sink or faucet, and drains and fills an aquarium without requiring buckets or priming. It makes cleaning and filling even a large aquarium fast and efficient. Most pet stores and several on-line stores, sell this product. <http://www.pythonproducts.com> For very large aquariums or stock tanks, a small pond pump with two water hoses or a sump pump can empty a large tank in about ten minutes for cleaning.

A quality filter can help with water quality as well, and you'll need a stronger filter for turtles than you do for fish. External canister filters often work much better than over-the-tank filters. Most filters (and tanks) sold "for turtles" are usually inadequate for the job. Some handy types make their own filter with a pond or fountain pump. Also, many people over-feed their turtles, and this can impact water quality and the rate of growth. An adult or older juvenile can be fed every other day. Some people also feed their turtle in a smaller "feeding container" such as a Rubbermaid or Sterilite container filled partially with water, to keep food particles from fouling the aquarium water. Remember, you'll need roughly 10 gallons per inch of turtle, so if your tank is too small, your water quality will reflect this as well. www.turtleforum.com also has a "habitat" section for Do It Yourself ideas on housing and filtration.

If your turtle is growing larger and you need a larger tank fast but the budget does not allow for an upgrade in the near future, consider a large Rubbermaid or Sterilite container from a home improvement store until an aquarium or pond can be purchased. Also try www.freecycle.org, www.craigslist.org, Pennysaver, flea markets, garage sales, and thrift stores to find inexpensive aquariums. Also, pre-formed ponds can often be purchased cheaper, gallon for gallon, than aquariums, at most home improvement stores. Rubbermaid stock tanks are especially good for sliders, and a 100 gallon Rubbermaid stock tank costs about \$80 at a farm supply store, and they're very light weight and hard to break. They are solid grey, though, but can be painted or decorated to match a room. Rubbermaid stock tanks come in 100, 150, and 300 gallon sizes, and are sold at Tractor Supply Co. and True Value as well as other farm supply stores.

If you are moving, turtles can be transported in the car or shipped to a new location after your move. Rubbermaid totes work well for transporting in a car, and can be filled with water for overnight stops if needed. Transport adult turtles on shredded newspaper, and juvenile turtles on damp sphagnum moss or damp paper towels. UPS and FedEx will ship turtles next day express, but shipping should only be done above 40F and below 90F. Visit http://www.turtlerescues.com/shipping_turtles.htm to learn more about shipping through UPS, FedEx, or Delta Dash.

If you absolutely cannot keep your turtle, consider one of the following options. Post an ad in the office of local pet stores and veterinary offices, or in the Pennysaver or other community publications. Petco and Petsmart typically allow these ads to be posted. Some animal control agencies and humane societies will accept turtles. Turtle Forum,www.turtleforum.com, has a section for posting turtles for adoption. Some pet stores will accept unwanted turtles. Most nature centers already have enough animals to care for, and not all nature centers care for turtles properly. If using Craigslist.org, screen potential adopters very carefully, consider making a "surrender contract" for the adopter to sign, and ask to see the driver's license of the adopter before they take the turtle, so you can verify their address.

If you absolutely cannot keep your turtle at this time, and cannot find a qualified home, you might consider humane euthanasia (a.k.a. putting it to sleep) at the office of a qualified veterinarian. *Although this might seem like a harsh suggestion, it is a humane alternative.* Turtles stress when put in new or inadequate environments, and few people can provide quality homes for adult sliders. There are thousands needing new homes, and quality homes are hard to come by. Euthanasia can be painless and performed with limited stress by a qualified veterinarian using pentobarbital. It is the final, selfless act of a kind and caring keeper, to be able to see that our pets have a quiet and painless end, just as it is our responsibility to make certain that they are cared for properly.

Releasing a slider to a pond or lake is not an alternative. This is illegal in most states for several reasons. Red-eared sliders are not native to much of the United States. They can cause environmental issues for our native turtles. There is also the risk of a slider transmitting a disease to our native wildlife. Even if you see red-eared sliders in your area, that does not mean they are native. More than likely they are dumped pets.

If you would like to help other turtles and owners from experiencing this same situation, please report the sale of hatchling red-eared sliders, particularly at beachware stores, by street vendors, and at flea markets, to the proper authorities, as there is a federal regulation that prevents their sale at that size. The regional Food and Drug Administration (FDA) office can be found in the blue pages of a phone book or at <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/ReportaProblem/ConsumerComplaintCoordinators/default.htm>, and the FDA will accept consumer complaints for the sale of hatchling sliders. Also, it is illegal to sell red-eared sliders in OH, OR, TN, VA, NC, IN, FL, and NJ. MD strictly enforces the "four inch" rule. If you see them being sold in these states, please contact the state wildlife agency, which can also be found in the blue pages of a phone book. In Maryland, you can call the Natural Resources Police at [410-356-7060](tel:410-356-7060).