



**Photo Credit: Jennifer Wren*

Italian Wall Lizards (*Podarcis* spp.)

Common and Widespread European Adapters

Also known as the ruin lizards, Italian wall lizards belong to a common and widespread genus of relatively small lacertid lizards generally ranging across much of northern Africa and Europe depending upon the exact species, with most species being found within the Mediterranean region. Currently, approximately 20 species recognized, although the Common or European Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) and the Italian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis sicula*) tend to be the most common and widespread species. These lizards are active and primarily diurnal species, often basking, foraging, and seeking refuge in shrubby vegetation, rocky areas, and even urban and suburban areas within their range. Wall lizards can be quite polymorphic in color and pattern depending on their age, sex, and reproductive status, and some species and subspecies can even occur in several color phases or morphs. However, most wall lizards have generally a brownish to grayish ground color with highly variable patterns consisting of lighter and darker colored spots, blotches, stripes, and/or reticulate patterns, and may also have darker markings on the throat. Sexually mature males can also often have a greenish to bluish-green wash coloration on their heads to dorsums as well. Wall lizards can be hardy and inexpensive species of reptiles to maintain as pets, and can provide much enjoyment and satisfaction.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Scincomorpha

Family: Lacertidae

Genus: *Podarcis*

Species: *Podarcis* spp.*

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Italian wall lizards can attain potential longevity of 5 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Italian wall lizards are a widespread genus of lizards, being found over much of the Mediterranean region, including northern Africa, Europe, and western Asia. General range for

the Common wall lizard at least, and depending on the species may cover Spain, France, Belgium, and Germany, to Italy, to Turkey. These lizards may be found in Mediterranean shrubland, to rocky areas, shorelines, gardens, agricultural areas, and even urban and suburban areas. Common wall lizards are also introduced in several other areas of the world, including several states in the United States.

Origin/History

Podarcis spp. Wagler, 1830. Specific species would have other authors first describing them during other years.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Italian wall lizards were imported to the United States in large numbers for the pet trade. These hardy, colorful little lizards are common in their native ranges, and would be easily captured in large numbers. Enterprising animal dealers bought them at a cut rate in Italy and sold them to pet dealers all over the United States (Russell Burke 2023).

Podarcis sicula and Podarcis muralis would be the two most commonly kept and imported Podarcis species. These lizards would also become a highly successful non-native species that would become established in several U.S. states through several different means, whether through dispersal of their eggs, or through unintentional pet releases or as stowaways. They would have no significant competition or natural predators in many of the urbanized areas they would expand to, which also contributed to their successful spread in the U.S.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Most Italian wall lizards are relatively small lacertid lizards, ranging from 3.5 to 7.5 inches as adults in total snout-to-tail length, or otherwise depending on the species, sex, and reproductive status. Snout to vent length varies depending on the exact species, but ranges from about 2.0 to 3.5 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile wall lizards can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult wall lizards are active lizards that require a minimum of a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or larger. Wall lizards can be maintained on a substrate of play sand mixture, orchid bark, or ground walnut shell substrates. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Providing soaking opportunities for them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking, climbing, and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs. Wall lizards will climb, but do not require a tall, or arboreal setup.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Wall lizards are frequent baskers, and thus a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter should be provided. Ideal temperatures for these lizards range from 78 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and around 90 to 105 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of wall lizards in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other

health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Italian wall lizards should be maintained at moderate levels of relative humidity, at, or within about 40 to 60%, but may vary somewhat with the species being maintained.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Insectivorous to Omnivorous; In the wild, wall lizards are primarily insectivorous, and will eat insects and other invertebrates. They may also consume some fruit, vegetable, and plant matter, as well as smaller vertebrates on occasion. Wall lizards in captivity can be given a variety of feeder insects and other invertebrates of appropriate size, frequency, and proportion at least two to three times weekly. Feeder crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, and other feeder insects, as well as some greens, fruits, and vegetable material such as dandelion greens and some commercially available omnivore and mixed fruit and vegetable diets can also be provided. They can also occasionally be given small pre-killed rodents of appropriate size, but sparingly. Providing calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation, as well as nutritional gutloading any feeder insects in these lizard's diets is essential for their health and well-being. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Wall lizards can often, at least initially, be shy and skittish species, but can become quite docile and tolerant of handling, or at least human presence and interaction once acclimated to their surroundings. Gentle and deliberate handling should take place with these lizards, as they can drop their tails when roughly handled or restrained too tightly.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

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