



\*Lesley Marshall  
\*Tetrapod Zoology



# Uromastyx, Mastigures, or Spiny Tailed Lizards

(*Uromastyx* spp.); Egyptian, Mali, Nigerian, Ornate, Saharan

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## Heat Loving Spiny Tails

Uromastyx are medium sized to large agamid lizards are also known as the “dabb” or “spiny tailed” lizards, as well as occasionally mastigures. They are medium sized to large agamid lizards that can be highly variable in color depending on sex and species, ranging from blackish, tan, yellowish, reddish, olive, to brown usually with lighter spots or ocelli on the back. All uromastyx can be identified by their short broad heads and short, thick, spiny tails. When these lizards are threatened or sense danger, they will seek retreat into rock crevices or burrows and inflate their bodies to make themselves very difficult to remove, and they will also use their spiny, club-like tails for defense or as a shield. Uromastyx will also frequently bask, thermoregulate, and forage during the peak of the warmest portions of the day. Uromastyx have, and still are rapidly becoming very popular, docile, and personable mid-sized lizard pets as more species, subspecies, localities, and even color morphs are becoming available in the herpetocultural hobby and industry.

## Taxonomy

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Iguania

**Family:** Agamidae

**Subfamily:** Uromasticinae

**Genus:** Uromastyx

**Species:** *Uromastyx* spp.\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

## Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, most uromastyx species can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

## **Species**

Several species of uromastyx are commonly kept, including the **Mali Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx maliensis*), **Egyptian Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx aegyptica*), **Nigerian Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx niger*), **Saharan Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx geyri*), **Moroccan Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx acanthinurus-nigriventris*), and **Ornate Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx ornata*).

## **Distribution and Habitat**

Uromastyx, or spiny tailed dab lizards are a very widely distributed genus of primarily terrestrial, arid to semi-arid region dwelling agamid lizards which, depending upon the species and subspecies, can range across much of the Saharan northern to northeastern Africa, through the Middle East, and into southwestern and south-central Asia. Within this broad range, species of uromastyx can occur in Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Algeria, Niger, Mali, Chad, Sudan, and Yemen. Within these ranges, most species of uromastyx occupy arid to semi-arid, rocky deserts to semi-deserts, scrublands, open savannahs and grasslands, to open, dry forests and woodlands, where they will seek shelter in deep burrows and/or rocky crevices in order to thermoregulate, forage for food, and avoid predation.

## **Origin/History**

Uromastyx spp. Merrem, 1820. The exact timeline and specifics of the first imports of Uromastyx spp. vary depending on the species and the region they were imported from, as different species of Uromastyx have different native ranges and were imported from different countries at different times. Since their initial importation however, Uromastyx have become well-established in the pet trade, with captive breeding helping to reduce the demand for wild-caught individuals.

In general, Uromastyx lizards have been popular in the pet trade for many decades. They were first imported to the United States and Europe since at least the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the most commonly kept Uromastyx species, such as the Moroccan Uromastyx (*Uromastyx acanthinura*) and the Egyptian Uromastyx (*Uromastyx aegyptia*), have been available in the pet trade since that time. Other species, such as the Saharan Uromastyx (*Uromastyx geyri*) and the Ornate Uromastyx (*Uromastyx ornata*), have become more widely available in more recent years.

## **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

## **Size**

Uromastyx vary in size depending on the species. Hatchlings and juveniles of most species typically range from about 7 to 10 cm, or about 3.0 to 4.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Adult sizes of the most commonly available Uromastyx species are as follows:

Egyptian Uromastyx (*Uromastyx aegyptica*), the largest species: Up to about 30.0 to 36.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length, or about 10.9 to 14.7 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Saharan Uromastyx (*Uromastyx geyri*): Approximately 10.0 to 15.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent (SVL) of about 6.8 to 8.29 inches.

Ornate Uromastyx (*Uromastyx ornata*): Total snout-to-tail length of about 10.0 to 14.5 inches, or approximately 7.6 inches in snout-to-vent (SVL) length).

Nigerian Uromastyx (*Uromastyx niger*): Total snout-to-tail length of about 10.0 to 14.5 inches. Snout-to-vent (SVL) of about 6.8 to 8.29 inches.

Mali Uromastyx (*Uromastyx maliensis*): Total snout-to-tail length of about 10.0 to 17.0 inches. Snout-to-vent (SVL) of about 6.8 to 8.29 inches.

North African or Moroccan Uromastyx (*Uromastyx acanthinurus-nigriventris*): Total snout-to-tail length of about 10.0 to 16.9 inches. Snout-to-vent (SVL) of about 6.8 to 8.29 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

**Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.** Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling uromastyx can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult uromastyx require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure OR a 4 foot by 2 foot sized enclosure (although this also depends on their activity levels, how often they will be taken out of the enclosure, and other husbandry variables). Some of the larger species may require larger housing. Hatchling and adult uromastyx can be maintained on a substrate of play sand mixtures, or ground walnut shell substrates. Avoid using substrates made from reptile bark that result in environments that are too humid. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Uromastyx are well suited for living in hot, arid conditions. For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Ideal temperatures for most uromastyx range in the low to mid 90's degrees F on the cool side and around 120 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 uromastyx 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. Uromastyx, or spiny tailed lizards should be maintained at low relative humidity of at, or around 30 to 40%, although this can vary somewhat depending on the exact species.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

**Primarily Herbivorous;** Uromastyx are primarily herbivorous, eating fruit, vegetable, flower, and other plant matter with insects and other invertebrates occasionally eaten as well. Diet composition can also vary somewhat depending on the species. In captivity, feed uromastyx mostly a mixed variety of vegetables and greens including carrots, peas, kale, corn, collard and dandelion greens, mustard greens, and beans. Feed green leaf lettuce sparingly if at all. Some appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms can also be given, but avoid feeding too many high fat foods. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Uromastyx also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. 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**

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile uromastyx typically tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your uromastyx gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Some species of uromastyx, such as the Nigerian uromastyx, can be slightly more skittish than others, but most adults will settle down considerably and become quite docile, personable, and interactive pets to keep with the correct care and handling.

**\*\*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**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

[Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com](mailto:Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com)

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