



Housing

There are many ways of housing reptiles and amphibians. A simple way of thinking about any vivarium is that it must not allow the escape of the inhabitant. On the face of it, that makes choosing housing very simple – however, as always there is much more to consider.

Plastic Box method

A simple vivarium can consist of plastic boxes – Really Useful Boxes (commonly known as RUBs in the hobby) are very popular with those that prefer a more “sterile” simple vivarium rather than the more advanced microclimate bio-active habitat. They come in a variety of sizes and are easy to keep clean. As they are not targeted specifically to the needs of the hobby some adaptation will be required – ventilation is very important to any reptile or amphibian (or invert) and either vents in the form of mesh will need to be installed or multiple holes drilled. The most effective would be to provide ventilation top and bottom. Ventilation can be an issue in this style of keeping. Many keepers use plastic boxes such as those provided by Vision in rack systems and this allows large numbers of snakes and species

such as Leopard geckos to be housed. They are commonly heated from below, this can be with heat mats or cables – the choice of substrate needs to be carefully thought about when using under floor heating – please refer to our substrate section.

There are various plastic boxes available that have been designed for reptile, amphibian and invert use. Most reptile brands offer something like this in their range, often referred to as faunariums. They come in a variety of sizes, and have ventilation in both the plastic tank and the lid – however, many view this as insufficient as it should have better lower ventilation for airflow. Most have “feet” on the bottom allowing heat cable to be used, however this can be a problem for heat mats as they are a “contact” heater and will work more efficiently with contact with the floor of the faunarium. Both RUBs and Faunariums have limitations and should be considered only by serious keepers (often breeders) providing temporary housing for hatchling / juvenile animals, less experienced keepers housing only one easy to keep species such as Leopard geckos and Corn snakes and perhaps by those more advanced keepers for projects that would benefit from using such an enclosure.

Coast to Coast Exotics, in the past, successfully used the plastic box / rack system method for many years and bred many “difficult” species – however, we moved away from this method many years ago providing a more enriched style of housing for our breeding animals. It is difficult to argue that the rack method is not successful, and we do not think it cruel or unsuitable for many species, but would like to see the use of them limited to certain species in breeding establishments. If you have those wonderful creatures why wouldn't you want to show them off in wonderful looking natural style vivaria?

“Enclosed” Vivaria

The traditional vivarium is a box, constructed of varying materials, with a door (or two - usually sliding) in one of the longer sides. As with plastic boxes, ventilation is of utmost importance, and some of the newer vivaria have vents top and bottom and many have a mesh top.

Melamine vivaria are probably the most common in the UK. Melamine is a chipboard product, and can last two to three years when housing arid species. For tropical humid environments their life span will be considerably shorter. One of the main benefits of using melamine vivaria is their insulation properties, they keep heat well. Also some individuals react

better to their containment walls, these individuals don't recognise glass and don't accept they cannot pass through. Solid walls alleviate this problem. Melamine vivaria are available in a variety of sizes, including tall arboreal style for species that climb. There are also the Terrainium style vivaria designed for use with species such as Leopard geckos – it has restricted height and can be (in many ways) considered somewhere between the plastic box and vivarium.

Glass vivaria have more recently become much more common in the UK, however, they have been the number one choice in mainland Europe for years. They are easy to keep clean and many can hold water allowing a more natural terrarium approach (see habitat section). They generally have good ventilation, with full mesh top and additional vents lower down. Their down sides are that they can be easily broken and do not hold heat well. They come in various sizes, from very small (suitable for inverts) right up to quite large and tall designs.

A more left field choice is the various fibre glass / resin / acrylic vivaria. These have the advantages of glass, but are much more durable and resistant to damage. They are very expensive.

“Open” Vivaria

It could be said that mesh topped vivaria are open, but here we use it to describe completely uncovered vivaria. The most commonly form is the tortoise table. They can be constructed from a variety of materials. Their main downside is that accessibility from the top allows for pets and children to have easy access to the inhabitants – not ideal. Many less experienced keepers find it difficult to maintain temperatures in open top vivaria, an enclosed vivarium is easier.

For the more experienced keepers, working with species that are suitable, a discussion of open top vivaria would not be complete without discussion of outdoor terraria. For some species, perhaps with the safe addition of additional heating, even as far North as the North of England can successfully provide very good housing. There is much to discuss if this was to be attempted, including site, drainage, protection from predators and much more – ask in store for a personal consultation on this topic. The commonest outdoor enclosure is for tortoise species such as Hermanns, Horsfields and Spur-thighed tortoises.

This care sheet was kindly provided by Kevin Stevens of Coast to Coast Exotics.

The IHS can accept no responsibility for the content of this sheet. The IHS does not in any way recommend any particular product - this must be at the owners discretion.