***Tortoise Care***

By **Griffin S.**

 As you walk down the numerous isles of the pet store, something snatches your attention. With natural curiosity, you look inside the glass cage, and you see a water bowl, a food bowl, a log, and a colorful rock. Suddenly, a small reptilian head comes out from within the rock. You realize it isn’t just a run of the mill rock, it’s a shell. That shell belongs to a Hermann tortoise. The animal gazes at you, and you ogle back. With a sheepish yawn, the prehistoric looking reptile returns to his armour. You can’t tear your eyes away from the cage. Thoughts rush through your head. You finally reach the conclusion of an everlasting feeling of want. You dash madly up to the cashier, insisting if you don’t get that Hermann tortoise, you will go insane. The cashier hands you the key to the tortoise’s cage, and you sprint back to the cage. You rip open the sliding glass door to the cage. You put your tortoise in a cardboard carry box. You slap two one hundred bills on the counter, and exit the building. You smile at the pet carrier in your hand. But something feels wrong in the back of your mind. It eats away your joy. Now, the corrupt part of your mind completely devourers your happiness. You feel a very grim dread. Your mind races. You feel confused and want to kick yourself. You realize you’ve made a mistake. A very, very, large mistake. You haven’t any idea of how to take care of your new Hermann tortoise! But believe it or not, Hermann tortoise care doesn’t have to be stressful. But, it is a huge responsibility. Someone who wants to love and care for their tortoise should make sure their tortoise has good housing, proper nutrition, and entertainment.

 First of all, everything needs shelter to survive. Tortoises as well. The two best types of cages for your Hermann tortoise are glass cages or a large tuber ware container. If you’re interested in purchasing a glass cage, try to look for a spacious tortoise home. If your tortoise’s living arrangement is too small, he won’t have enough room to move around, resulting in an unhappy and inactive pet. If a glass cage puts too much of a dent in your wallet, then a tuber ware container is a cheaper alternative. Similar to the glass cage, you want to use the largest tuber ware container possible. Tuber ware is cheaper, and it’s easier to find a large container. Although, it isn’t as durable as a glass cage. Along with a nice cage, your tortoise will also need comfortable bedding in their home. Zoo Med reptile carpet is one of the best options. You can buy it online or at your local pet store. But, a cheaper alternative that is just as great is towels. Towels make cleaning your tortoise’s cage a piece of cake! When you notice feces in your reptilian companion’s cage, you can remove the towels from the cage and throw them in the wash. Then, you can put fresh towels back in their cage. Those are two of the best beddings in my opinion. But, there is a couple of beddings you should stay away from. One of them is cypress mulch. This mulch-like beddings gathers bacteria easily. It also makes cleaning a nightmare. When you’re preparing to clean the cage, it feels like your preparing for war. When you’re cleansing your tortoise’s house, you have to dig out all the old mulch out, wipe the cage down, and dump new mulch in. Plus, in my experience with cypress mulch, my tortoise Rex was very unhappy. Now, she enjoys her containment more because I use towels. Other than a nice cage and bedding, your tortoise must have a food and water bowl. Those are the basics of what your tortoise’s living quarters should have.

 Not only does a Hermann tortoise need a proper living space, your armored pet should have a nutritious, high fiber, low protein diet. Your tortoise’s primary diet should consist of organic grasses and hays. Timothy hay works best. If your tortoise is very particular about what they like, and what they dislike and refuse to eat the hay you provide them, don’t rip out your hair over it. My tortoise refuses to ingest hay. So, I cut the hay into fine, tiny little pieces and then I sprinkle and mix it with greens such as lettuces and spring mix. If your tortoise eats the hay without mixed greens, feel free to reward your tortoise with greens such as romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, or spring mix. Hermann tortoises can also enjoy shredded carrots. Although fruit are delicious, they’re high in sugar and shouldn’t be fed to your ancient looking pet. Spinach is another don’t. Although it is a leafy green, it has loads of protein. Silly tortoise, spinach is for humans! Along with basic food, you’ll also need calcium powder. The brand I buy is Zoo Med. No matter what food you’re feedings your tortoise, sprinkle the calcium powder once a week. Depending on your specific tortoise, or other factors, you may need to use the calcium powder more or less. Ask your local exotic pet veterinarian for details. Just like us, tortoises need water too. You should always supply fresh water to your tortoise. At the end of the day, replenish their water supply with fresh water (filtered water would be best).

 Similar to us humans, Hermann tortoises need to have fun! You can tell if your tortoise is happy by making sure they don’t bite. A strong chomp on your finger can hurt like laying on a bed of super-heated nails. Biting from tortoises shows they’re unhappy, angry, or aggressive. One way to entertain your Hermann tortoise should be soaked in water for a minimum of thirty minutes twice a week. Most importantly, make sure the water in whatever they’re soaking in shallow enough so they can stand. A perfect water amount is about half away up the shell. If you have a large plastic or inflatable pool, your tortoise can soak in something similar to that. But, if you’re stuck indoors, you can use a long tuber ware container. When you’re cleaning out the soaking unit, you should dump out the dirty water, spray the entire inside of the pool or tuber ware container with vinegar water, rinse out with fresh water, and finally wipe down with paper towels. Soaking your Hermann tortoise not only fun for the tortoise, but it is also necessary. If your tortoise isn’t soaked, they can develop shell rot. You can tell if this happens if their shell looks ill fitting. Furthermore, your tortoise needs exercise. If your house has a large lawn, the outside temperature is seventy degrees or more, and you’re not near a busy road, you can do your tortoise a favor and let them adventure the outdoors. But, not all places are suited for a cold-blooded reptile to walk around outside. If it is too cold, your lawn is miniature, or you’re near a busy road, than don’t let your tortoise just sit in their cage, wondering when they will get to walk around a vast, open space. If you want to be kind to your reptile pet, let them walk around your kitchen. Those are just some of the ways I keep my Hermann tortoise entertained and active.

 So finally, you can stop ripping your hair out over why you bought your tortoise without any caring experience. Caring for a Hermann tortoise is easy if you don’t over react. But as always, a loving tortoise owner should always and forever (at least for as long as your tortoise lives, which is usually seventy-five to one hundred years old) give their tortoise a large and luxurious home, a high fiber, low protein diet, and some entertainment.