

Eastern Musk Turtle Care Sheet

(*Sternotherus odoratus*)

Quick Facts

- **Size:** Adults typically reach 3-5 inches in length.
- **Lifespan:** 30-50 years with proper care.
- **Temperament:** Generally shy and non-aggressive, though they may bite if threatened.
- **Activity Level:** Semi-aquatic; active swimmers but enjoy basking and bottom-walking.
- **Diet:** Omnivorous; prefers protein-rich foods with occasional plant matter.



Overview:

The Eastern Musk Turtle, also known as the “Stinkpot,” is a small, aquatic turtle native to the eastern United States. They are excellent for beginners and experienced keepers due to their manageable size and hardiness. Musk turtles are known for their shy demeanor and distinctive musky odor, which they may release as a defense mechanism.

Habitat Requirements

Tank Setup

- **Tank Size:** Minimum of 20 gallons for one adult; 30 gallons for a pair.
- **Water Depth:** Shallow water (6-10 inches) with areas for easy access to the surface, as they are not strong swimmers.
- **Substrate:** Sand or fine gravel; avoid sharp materials that can injure their skin.
- **Basking Area:** Provide a floating dock or rocks for basking under a heat source.

Water Quality

- **Filtration:** A strong filter is essential to maintain water quality, as musk turtles produce significant waste.
- **Temperature:** Keep water at 72-78°F. Use an aquarium heater if necessary.
- **pH Level:** Neutral to slightly alkaline (6.5-7.5).
- **Cleaning:** Perform weekly water changes (25-50%) to prevent buildup of harmful substances.

Lighting and Heating

- **UVB Lighting:** Required to support shell and bone health. Use a UVB bulb for 10-12 hours daily.
- **Basking Spot Temperature:** Maintain at 85-90°F with a heat lamp.
- **Ambient Temperature:** 75-80°F during the day, 70-75°F at night.

Diet and Feeding

- **Protein Sources:** Earthworms, bloodworms, shrimp, snails, small fish, and commercial turtle pellets.
- **Vegetation:** Offer leafy greens like dandelion greens, collard greens, or aquatic plants like duckweed.
- **Feeding Frequency:** Juveniles should be fed daily; adults can be fed every other day.
- **Calcium Supplementation:** Dust food with calcium powder (with or without vitamin D3) once or twice a week.

Handling and Behavior

- **Handling:** Minimize handling as it can cause stress. Always support the turtle's body securely.
- **Behavior:** Eastern Musk Turtles are generally shy and spend much of their time underwater or hiding.

Health and Maintenance

- **Common Health Issues:** Shell rot, respiratory infections, and parasitic infestations. Regular tank maintenance and proper diet can prevent most problems.
- **Signs of Illness:** Lethargy, loss of appetite, difficulty swimming, or unusual spots on the shell. If noticed, consult a reptile veterinarian.

Fun Facts

1. Musk turtles are named for the musky odor they can release when threatened.
2. They are excellent climbers and may attempt to escape enclosures without secure lids.
3. Despite being aquatic, they are often seen walking along the bottom of their tanks or shallow streams.

By following these guidelines, you can ensure your Eastern Musk Turtle thrives and becomes a fascinating addition to your collection!