

River Cooter Turtle Care Sheet

(*Pseudemys concinna*)

Quick Facts

- **Size:** Males 9-12 inches; females 11-16 inches.
- **Lifespan:** 20-40+ years with proper care.
- **Temperament:** Peaceful and social; may coexist with other turtles of similar size and temperament.
- **Activity Level:** Highly active swimmers and avid baskers.
- **Diet:** Primarily herbivorous as adults, though juveniles eat more protein.



Overview:

River Cooter Turtles are medium to large freshwater turtles native to rivers, streams, and ponds in the southeastern United States. Known for their attractive shell patterns and active nature, they are excellent swimmers and love basking in the sun. River Cooters thrive in spacious enclosures with plenty of room to swim, bask, and explore.

Habitat Requirements

Tank Setup

- **Tank Size:** Minimum of 100 gallons for one adult; larger tanks or outdoor ponds are ideal for multiple turtles.
- **Water Depth:** Deep water (12-18 inches) is preferred; provide resting spots like large driftwood or ledges.
- **Substrate:** Optional; smooth river stones or sand can be used but are not necessary.
- **Basking Area:** Large, secure basking spots made of floating platforms, logs, or rocks.

Water Quality

- **Filtration:** A high-powered filter is essential to handle the waste produced by larger turtles.
- **Temperature:** Maintain water temperature between 75-80°F; slightly cooler (70-75°F) for adults during winter months if brumating.
- **pH Level:** Neutral to slightly alkaline (6.5-8.0).
- **Cleaning:** Perform 25-50% water changes weekly to maintain excellent water quality.



Lighting and Heating

- **UVB Lighting:** Essential for shell and bone health; provide 10-12 hours daily with a UVB bulb.
- **Basking Spot Temperature:** 90-95°F under a heat lamp.
- **Ambient Temperature:** 75-80°F during the day, 70-75°F at night.

Diet and Feeding

- **Protein Sources (Juvenile):** Insects, worms, snails, shrimp, and commercial turtle pellets.
- **Vegetation (Adults):** Dark, leafy greens (collard greens, dandelion greens, romaine lettuce), aquatic plants (water lettuce or duckweed), and algae.
- **Fruits (Occasional Treats):** Small amounts of berries, melon, or apple.
- **Feeding Frequency:** Juveniles eat daily; adults eat every 2-3 days.
- **Calcium Supplementation:** Dust food with calcium powder (with or without vitamin D3) weekly.

Handling and Behavior

- **Handling:** Handle only when necessary, as they can become stressed. Always support the body securely.
- **Behavior:** River Cooters are very active and enjoy swimming, basking, and grazing on aquatic plants. They may become tame and recognize their keepers over time.

Health and Maintenance

- **Common Health Issues:** Shell rot, respiratory infections, and vitamin deficiencies. Regular tank maintenance and a balanced diet are key to prevention.
- **Signs of Illness:** Lethargy, swollen eyes, changes in appetite, or wheezing. Consult a reptile veterinarian if symptoms occur.
- **Shell Maintenance:** Provide UVB lighting and a varied diet for optimal shell growth.

Fun Facts

1. The name “cooter” is derived from the West African word “kuta”, meaning turtle.
2. River Cooters are fast swimmers and can often outpace predators in the wild.
3. Their beautiful, intricately patterned shells make them a favorite among turtle enthusiasts.

By following these care guidelines, your River Cooter will thrive and bring enjoyment for many years!