



# Red Headed Agama

(Agama agama)

Habitat: Semi-Desert Diet: Insectivorous  
Adult Size: 12-14 inches Lifespan: 6-10 years Native To: Africa

## Did You Know???

- Their name notwithstanding, Red Headed Agamas actually have heads that are more bright orange than red.
- In nature, Red Headed Agamas form groups of 10-20, with one male as the leader. If a male from outside the group appears, a fight will ensue over leadership of the group. When males fight, they change colors, their heads becoming brown, with white spots appearing on their bodies.
- Red Headed Agamas fight by striking with their long tails. They can inflict serious injuries to one another with these powerful tail lashings.

## What You Should Know About the Red Headed Agama

**The Basics** -- Sometimes called the "rainbow lizard," or "rainbow agama," the Red Headed Agama is one of the most colorful lizards available to the pet trade (at least this is true of dominant males.) Mature males in breeding are a sight to behold with brilliant orange heads, indigo or black legs and backs, and blue-white tails accented by orange highlights. Males will also engage in head bobbing and other displays of dominance when threatened, or to attract a mate. Reaching 14 inches and occasionally more in length, males are larger than females. Although males are territorial and should not be housed together, this is a calm lizard overall and it often gets used to being handled by its keeper. The tip of the Red Headed Agama's tongue is covered with mucus glands, which aid it in catching and holding insects. Care requirements for most other agamas are very similar to those for the Red Headed Agama.

**Enclosure: They Need A Lot Of Room** -- The more space the Red Headed Agama is provided with, the better. A male and two females should be housed in at least a 100-gallon aquarium, or a custom enclosure measuring 4' x 2' x 2'. The enclosure should be relatively dry with numerous rocks, cork barks and logs for climbing, as well as hiding areas located in both the warmer and cooler zones.

**Substrate: A Variety Works** -- Calci sand, peat moss and orchid bark mulch work well as a substrate in the Red Headed Agama's enclosure, as do a variety of other materials. Aromatic woods, such as cedar and pine must never be used. Substrate should be spot cleaned daily, and replaced completely every month.

**Lighting: UVB Exposure A Must** -- Red Headed Agamas need exposure to UVB rays 12-14 hours per day to produce vitamin D3, which is essential to the animal's ability to absorb calcium. Unlike people, lizards like the Red Headed Agamas cannot produce their own Vitamin D3, so they must depend on UVB rays. Without Vitamin D3, the lizard will not have a sufficient supply of calcium even if it is given a supplement, a condition that will lead to the development of a metabolic bone disease. Full spectrum fluorescent bulbs designed specifically for reptiles, and available at PSP, should be used to provide UVB rays. Fluorescent lamps should be replaced every six months to ensure correct UVB output. Glass blocks out UVB light, so overhead light sources should be kept behind a wire mesh cover, not a glass or acrylic tank top. The UVB light source should be within 12 inches of the animal.

**Temperature: They like it hot** -- The enclosure's ambient temperatures should range from 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit during the day, with a basking spot around 90 degrees. At night the temperature can be lowered to the mid to upper 70s. Providing a thermal gradient allows the Red Headed Agama to regulate its body temperature by moving around the enclosure. A variety of combinations of overhead lamps and under-tank heat pads can be used to maintain temperatures. To avoid burns, lamps should be screened off or positioned outside the enclosure. Using too powerful a bulb will make the enclosure too hot, and could prove fatal to the animal. Nighttime temperatures can be maintained by using ceramic heat emitters, which do not produce light. Follow directions carefully with ceramic heat emitters, use fixtures with porcelain or ceramic sockets and to protect against fires, do not place them by dry wood or flammable fabrics. Thermometers should be positioned in the warmer and cooler areas of the enclosure as well as in the basking spot.

**Diet: Insects On The Menu** -- In nature, Red Headed Agamas will eat insects as well as the occasional small mammal or other lizard. However, in captivity, their diet should consist exclusively, or almost exclusively of insects. Some keepers might want to feed their pet a day-old feeder mouse on occasion, but is certainly not necessary. Never feed the animal wild-caught insects, as they can transmit disease. Commercially available and gut loaded crickets, mealworms, silkworms, earthworms, roaches and kingworms can be fed to this lizard. Insects should be dusted with a reptile vitamin and calcium powder every third or fourth feeding.

**Water** -- Red Headed Agamas often prefer to take droplets from surface areas in their enclosure, rather than drinking from a bowl. Nevertheless, a shallow bowl of clean water should be provided at all times. These lizards do best in an enclosure with low humidity levels.

## How To Handle A Red Headed Agama

Many Red Headed Agamas will accept being handled over time. To handle medium lizards like the Red Headed Agama, grasp with one hand on the section of the lizard where you can straddle across its back at the front legs. Use your other hand to take hold of the hips. A Red Headed Agama should not be picked up by the neck or tail. Approach the lizard from the side, rather than from overhead. Be calm, and speak reassuringly to the lizard.

Always have the lizard's head facing away from you to avoid being bitten, and never hold any lizard close to your face. Always wash your hands after handling any reptile.

### Look Out For This:

Although they are not very large, Red Headed Agamas are active, powerful lizards that require a relatively large enclosure relative to their size. Housing them in a small space will cause stress.



### Recommended Red Headed Agama Supplies:

- q A large enclosure with a secure lid
- q UVB Light source
- q Heat lamps and under tank heat pads
- q Three thermometers, so temperature can be monitored at both ends of the enclosure and in the basking area
- q Substrate
- q Shallow water bowl
- q Rocks, logs and hiding places