

Instructions on waking your tortoise from hibernation

These instructions apply to any age of tortoise and to whatever method of hibernation you used. Obviously if you are using the fridge method then the trigger to wake him will be the length of time he has been asleep, or if you have found faeces or urine when you did your weekly check around the body.

If you use the garage or shed method than as soon as you hear your tortoise rustling about in the Spring, it's time to get him up. Even if it is still only February, if temperatures are high enough then he will wake. That is why you must monitor the temperature to try and avoid him waking too early. If necessary put the hibernation box back out into the garden during the day if the daytime temperatures are reaching close to 10c. If it reaches 10c then he will stir. When this happens, don't ignore him and leave him – this will distress him and with no food in his stomach he will suffer muscle wastage by moving around trying to get out.

It takes weeks for a tortoise to slow down because we want him to empty his gut and bowel and food takes a time to travel through. When waking though we do this quickly, all in one day. Try if possible to start the process in the morning so that your tortoise has as much of the day as possible to awaken and get going.

Take the following action:-

1. Move the box containing your tortoise inside and place directly next to a radiator. As close as you can, but without actually touching.
2. When your tortoise starts to move about and is wide awake (this may take up to a couple of hours), take him out of the box and place him in his indoor accommodation (without lamp at this stage) or on the floor to 'get his bearings' and continue to warm through.
3. After another hour pop his basking lamp on for half an hour. Then give him a tepid warm bath. Wipe his face and his eyes.
Then tell him how happy you are to see him again, and how much you love him! This isn't compulsory though! 😊
4. Then place him back under his basking lamp in his indoor accommodation.
5. Let him bask and offer him food. He should eat. If he doesn't then he should definitely eat within the next 48 hours. If he hasn't then call us – something is not as it should be.

Then it's just a case of keeping him somewhere bright and warm (room temperature of 20c). Keep his basking lamp on from about 8.30/9am to 4pm. A basking lamp is **critical**. You won't keep his core temperature high enough to keep him eating regularly just in a centrally heated room. It isn't expensive to provide a basking lamp – just a bendy arm desk lamp or anglepoise lamp with a 60w normal spotlight bulb.

It's important that the light levels are as high as possible. So place him by a window. We also recommend providing a UV lamp to sit next to the basking lamp. If you are raising young tortoises supplying a UV lamp is **critical** to their shell development.

As the temperatures rise outside over the weeks, you can pop him out for an hour or so. Before doing so though, make sure he has been basking to raise his core temperature.

A greenhouse is a great help in Spring, or indeed the plastic mini greenhouses that are available. You will be surprised how quickly they warm up and protect your tortoise from Spring breezes. It will be many weeks before the temperatures rise enough for the tortoise to spend all day out in the garden, and even longer before he can sleep out all night again.