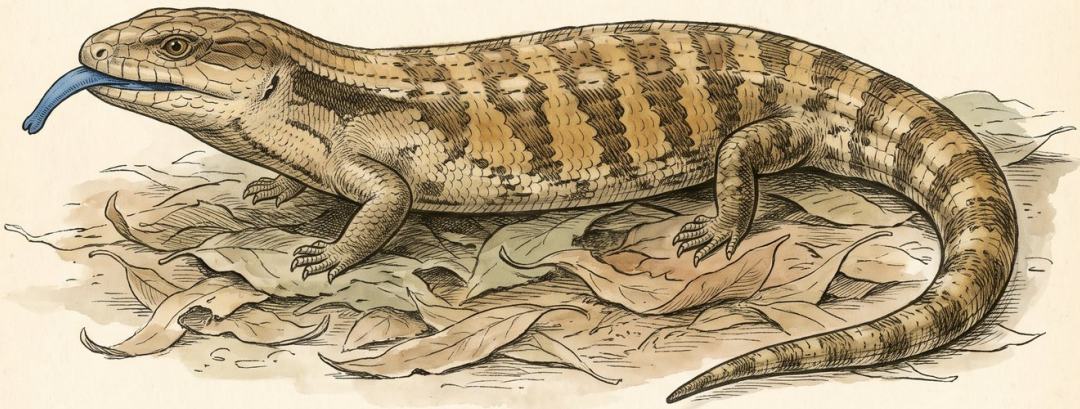


WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Blue Tongue Skink

The gentle, sturdy omnivore with a famous party trick



Family-owned in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters nationwide

13 sections · walnutcreeksupply.com

CONTENTS

What's Inside

-
- 01 **Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours**
-
- 02 **Meet Your Blue Tongue Skink**
-
- 03 **Enclosure Setup & Layout**
-
- 04 **Substrate Guide**
-
- 05 **Heat, UVB & Humidity: The 3 Numbers**
-
- 06 **Diet & Nutrition**
-
- 07 **Shedding & Brumation**
-
- 08 **Common Challenges & Solutions**
-
- 09 **Handling**
-
- 10 **Routine Care Calendar**
-
- 11 **When to See a Vet**
-
- 12 **FAQ**
-
- 13 **Every Purchase Gives Back**

New owner? Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.

*Meet the lizard that behaves like a small, scaly, slightly grumpy dog. Blue tongue skinks are stocky, ground-walking, snail-loving **omnivores** (animals that eat both animal and plant foods) that grow to about **18 to 24 inches**, live **15 to 20 years or more**, and are widely considered among the most docile and handleable lizards in the hobby. They waddle over to see what you are doing. They eat from your hand. And when they are truly alarmed, they flatten their bodies, hiss like a punctured tire, and flash a tongue so startlingly blue it looks like a trick. This guide is written the way we would explain it to a neighbor standing in our driveway in Christiana, Lancaster County: warm, honest, and detailed, with no mystery ingredients. The two things that decide whether a blue tongue thrives are **floor space** (they live on the ground, so width and length matter and height does not) and **portion control** (they are charming, enthusiastic eaters, and obesity is the most common problem we see). Read the Quick Start first, build the enclosure before the lizard comes home, and plan for a pet that will be part of your family for a very long time.*

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

- 1. Set up the complete enclosure before your skink arrives.** One adult needs a minimum of **4' long x 2' deep x 1.5 to 2' tall**. Blue tongues are ground-dwellers, so floor area is what counts; extra height adds nothing. A standard 40-gallon aquarium is too small for an adult, though a young skink can start in one temporarily if you upgrade on schedule. Whatever you choose, it needs a **secure, locking lid or front-opening doors**. Blue tongues are strong and determined, and a loose lid is an invitation.
- 2. Build the temperature gradient and prove it with real measurements.** Basking surface **100 to 110°F**, warm-side air **85 to 95°F**, cool end **75 to 80°F**, nighttime **70 to 75°F**. Use a handheld infrared temperature gun for surfaces and a probe thermometer for air. Run everything for a full 24 hours before the animal goes in. Every heat source must be controlled by a **thermostat**, with no exceptions.
- 3. Install the UVB lamp and run it before the skink arrives.** Blue tongues need a **linear T5 HO UVB tube**, sized for **Ferguson zone 2 to 3**. (The Ferguson zone system sorts reptiles by how much natural UV their wild habitat delivers: zone 1 is shade-dwellers, zone 4 is full-sun desert lizards. Blue tongues are open-woodland and grassland animals that bask, so they sit in the middle.) UVB is how the skin makes vitamin D3, which lets the body absorb calcium. Without it, a skink develops **metabolic bone disease (MBD)**, a painful softening and deformity of the skeleton that is entirely preventable.
- 4. Get humidity and water right.** Australian forms want **30 to 40% ambient humidity**, which is easy in most homes. Indonesian blue tongues need **60 to 70%**. Either way, add a **humid hide**, which is an enclosed hide box packed with damp sphagnum moss or damp coconut fiber. Provide a heavy water bowl large enough to soak in.
- 5. Lay the substrate and place at least three hides.** Fill the floor with 2 to 4 inches of a safe, diggable substrate (see the Substrate Guide). Place one hide on the warm end, one on the cool end, and the humid hide in between. A skink with only one place to hide is a stressed skink.
- 6. Plan the first meal, but do not rush it.** A new arrival is usually ready to eat within a day or two. Have a small, varied plate ready: a few finely chopped greens, a little shredded squash or carrot, and one protein item such as a dubia roach or a spoonful of plain cooked egg. If it ignores the food on day one, that is normal. Remove it and try again tomorrow.
- 7. Leave your new skink alone for 48 to 72 hours.** Place it in the enclosure, check food and water quietly, and let it find the basking spot, the hides, and the water bowl. Handling can start after it has eaten and is moving around confidently.
- 8. Weigh your skink on day one and write it down.** A kitchen scale that reads in grams is perfect. That first number is the baseline for every body-condition decision you will make for the next two decades. Start a simple log with the weight, the date, and the enclosure temperatures.

9. **Wash your hands after every contact with the skink or anything in its enclosure.** Reptiles can carry **Salmonella**, a bacterium that causes no harm to them but can make people seriously ill. Households with children under five, older adults, pregnant women, or anyone with a weakened immune system should be extra careful. Soap and water for 20 seconds, every time.
10. **Find an exotic veterinarian before you need one.** Confirm that the clinic sees reptiles, ask about after-hours emergencies, and book a first wellness visit with a fecal exam within the first month. Put the number on the enclosure.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

Essentials

- **An appropriately sized enclosure** with at least 4' x 2' of floor space for an adult, a secure lid or lockable front doors, and good ventilation. Wood, PVC, and glass all work; front-opening designs are less stressful for the skink than reaching in from above.
- **A basking heat source** such as a halogen flood lamp, mounted over one end to create a 100 to 110°F surface, with a **dimming thermostat** and a probe placed at skink level on the basking surface.
- **A secondary ambient heat source** such as a ceramic heat emitter or radiant heat panel, on its own **on/off or pulse-proportional thermostat**, to hold the warm-side air at 85 to 95°F and keep nights from dropping below 70°F.
- **A linear T5 HO UVB tube** with a matching fixture and reflector, long enough to cover most of the warm half of the enclosure, replaced on the manufacturer's schedule.
- **A digital infrared temperature gun** for checking surfaces, plus **at least two digital probe thermometers**, one for the warm side and one for the cool end.
- **A digital hygrometer** placed at skink height, away from the water bowl, so you get a real number instead of a guess.
- **Three hides:** one warm, one cool, and one dedicated humid hide. Each should be snug enough that the skink's back touches the walls.
- **Substrate** appropriate for burrowing and humidity control, enough for 2 to 4 inches across the whole floor.
- **A heavy, wide, shallow water bowl** that cannot be tipped, large enough for the skink to climb in and soak.
- **A separate shallow feeding dish** with a rim, such as a ceramic or glass dish that keeps greens and protein off the substrate.
- **Plain calcium powder without D3** and a **reptile multivitamin** for the supplement schedule.
- **A digital kitchen scale** that reads in grams, for monthly weigh-ins.

Ready to set up? Browse the essentials in our collections: [Reptile and Amphibian Enclosures](#) and [Reptile and Amphibian Terrarium Supplies & Accessories](#).

Enrichment

- **Flat stones and slate pieces** for the skink to climb over and bask on, set directly on the enclosure floor (never on top of loose substrate where they can shift and trap a digger).
- **Cork bark flats and half-rounds** for tunnels, ramps, and visual cover that make a long enclosure feel like a landscape.
- **Sturdy, low-profile plants**, live or artificial. Blue tongues will trample anything delicate, so choose stout ones.
- **A background or opaque side panels** on at least two or three sides to cut reflections and help the skink feel secure.

Enrichment, one click away. Shop Reptile and Amphibian Accessories.

SECTION 2

Meet Your Blue Tongue Skink

Blue tongue skinks belong to the genus *Tiliqua*, a small group of large, heavy-bodied skinks found across **Australia, New Guinea, and parts of Indonesia**. In the wild they live in open woodland, scrubland, grassland, and the edges of gardens, wandering the ground by day, hunting snails and beetles, nibbling flowers and fruit, and tucking under logs and leaf litter when the sun gets too hot. They are not climbers and not sprinters. They are patient, plodding foragers with strong jaws and a very good nose.

Trait	Detail
Common name	Blue tongue skink
Genus	<i>Tiliqua</i>
Native range	Australia, New Guinea, Indonesia (varies by species)
Wild habitat	Open woodland, scrub, grassland, garden edges
Hatchling size	5 to 7 inches (born live; skinks of this genus do not lay eggs)
Adult length	18 to 24 inches total, stocky and heavy for its length
Adult weight	Typically 1 to 2 pounds or more, depending on form and body condition
Typical lifespan	15 to 20+ years with good care
Activity pattern	Diurnal (active by day), ground-dwelling
Social structure	Solitary ; one per enclosure
Temperament	Calm, curious, and handleable; rarely bites
Diet	Omnivore : roughly 50% protein, 40 to 45% vegetables and greens, 5 to 10% fruit

The forms you will see for sale

Several kinds of blue tongue skink are available, and while they share the same basic care, there are a few differences that matter. All of the blue tongues sold in the United States are captive-bred, because Australia prohibits the export of its native wildlife. Always buy captive-bred.

Form	Scientific name	Look and size	What to know
Northern blue tongue	<i>Tiliqua scincoides intermedia</i>	Warm brown, salmon, or orange banding over a pale background; 18 to 24 inches	The most common pet form and a great place to start; the care in this guide is written around it
Eastern blue tongue	<i>Tiliqua scincoides scincoides</i>	Grayer, cooler tones with darker bands; a little stockier; 18 to 24 inches	Same care as the Northern; often a bit less colorful
Indonesian blue tongue	<i>Tiliqua gigas</i> (several subspecies)	Darker, richly patterned, often with orange or red banding; 18 to 24 inches	Comes from humid rainforest edges; needs 60 to 70% humidity and a steadier, moister setup

Form	Scientific name	Look and size	What to know
Shingleback (also called bobtail)	<i>Tiliqua rugosa</i>	Rough, pinecone-like scales and a short, blunt tail that stores fat; around 12 to 16 inches	A more specialized animal from dry Australian country; slower to adapt and more demanding; a better choice once you have experience

If you are choosing your first blue tongue, a captive-bred Northern or Eastern is the straightforward path. The Indonesian forms are wonderful animals, but the humidity requirement makes them a step up. Throughout this guide, we give the Australian numbers first and call out the Indonesian differences where they matter.

Why the blue tongue exists

The cobalt-blue tongue is a defensive weapon, and it is a good one. A blue tongue skink cannot outrun a bird, snake, or monitor lizard, and it is far too stout to climb away. So when it is cornered, it turns itself into a spectacle. It faces the threat, **flattens and widens its body to look bigger**, opens its mouth wide, **hisses loudly**, and then sticks out a startling, vivid blue tongue against a pink mouth lining. Researchers believe the blue is particularly bright in the ultraviolet range that many bird predators see well, which may be why the display works. For a moment, the predator is startled, confused, or worried about what that strange color means. Often that moment is enough.

In a home, the same display tells you something simple: "**I am frightened. Please give me a minute.**" It is a bluff much more often than a threat. We will explain exactly how to read it in the Handling section.

Temperament

This is the reason the species is so beloved. Blue tongue skinks are typically calm, tolerant, and curious, and a well-handled one will often walk onto your hand, explore your lap, and settle down for a sunbath on your chest. They are not clingy, but they are companionable. They do not usually bite. When they do, the bite is a **firm, broad-jawed clamp** from a skink built to crush snail shells, and it can be startling and sore even though it rarely breaks the skin deeply. A bite is almost always a last resort after the hiss and the flattening have been ignored.

What surprises new owners

Four things catch most new keepers off guard. The first is **how much they want to eat**. A blue tongue will try to eat nearly anything you hold out, and "he loves it" is not the same as "it is good for him." The second is **how little height matters**. People buy a tall tank and are shocked to learn that the skink wants a long, wide floor and simply ignores everything above it. The third is the **size of the droppings and the amount of digging**: this is a substantial animal that rearranges its furniture. The fourth is **how individual they are**. Two blue tongues in the same room can have genuinely different personalities, from shy and watchful to bold and nosy. You will learn yours quickly.

SECTION 3

Enclosure Setup & Layout

Floor space first

The single most important rule in blue tongue housing is that **floor area is everything**. These lizards walk, dig, and patrol, and they will use every square foot you give them. They do not climb, so a tall enclosure is a waste of money and makes it harder to hold heat. A good enclosure is long, wide, and low.

Life stage	Age	Minimum enclosure size	Notes
Hatchling	0 to 6 months	3' x 1.5' footprint (a 40-gallon breeder is acceptable short-term)	Use paper towel or a thin layer of safe substrate so you can monitor droppings and food intake; add plenty of cover
Juvenile	6 to 18 months	4' x 2' x 1.5'	Many keepers skip the small tank and go straight to this size, adding extra hides so it feels secure
Adult	18 months and older	4' x 2' x 1.5 to 2' minimum for one adult	Larger is always better; a 4' x 2' x 2' enclosure matches the common 120-gallon footprint

A **40-gallon aquarium is too small for an adult**. At 36 inches long and 18 inches wide, it leaves no room for a real temperature gradient, which is the whole point of the setup. Larger skinks, and Indonesian forms in particular, do better with more.

Enclosure materials and access

Wood (sealed melamine or laminate), PVC, and glass terrariums all work. Wood and PVC hold heat and humidity better and are easier to keep warm in a cooler house. Glass is easy to see through but loses heat quickly and can make the skink feel exposed unless you cover the sides.

Choose a **front-opening design** if you can. In the wild, a blue tongue's predators arrive from above. A hand reaching down through a top-opening lid is, to the skink's instincts, a hawk. A front door removes that signal entirely. Whatever you choose, make sure the lid or doors **lock**, because blue tongues are strong, patient, and perfectly capable of nudging up an unsecured screen.

The layout, from warm end to cool end

Picture the enclosure as a long rectangle viewed from above, divided into three equal zones from left to right. Blue tongues thermoregulate by walking from warm to cool along the floor, so the layout is a horizontal gradient.

Zone	Position	Temperature target	What goes here
Zone A: Basking end	Left third	Basking surface 100 to 110°F ; air 85 to 95°F	Flat basking stone or slate directly under the heat lamp; UVB tube mounted above and running along the zone; warm hide against the left wall; feeding dish nearby
Zone B: Middle	Center third	Air 80 to 85°F	Humid hide with damp moss or coconut fiber; a shallow digging area; cork bark ramps and a low plant; water bowl placed here so evaporation does not push humidity too high on the warm end
Zone C: Cool end	Right third	Air 75 to 80°F	Cool hide against the right wall; a second flat stone; sparse cover for a skink that wants to sit out in the open without being baked

From the front-door viewpoint, you should see three clear stations. At the **left**, a bright, warm basking stone with a hide tucked just beside it. At the **center**, a darker, cooler, damp-looking area with a humid hide, water, and a digging spot. At the **right**, a cooler, shadier nook with another hide. Substrate runs continuously across the floor from end to end. The UVB tube should run along the back of the warm half of the enclosure, with a reflector above the basking zone.

Place the heat probe from your thermostat **on the basking surface at skink level**, not in the air and not near the lamp. Place a second thermometer at the cool end. Place the hygrometer in the middle zone at skink height. Check all three before you ever put the animal in.

Hides, cover, and visual security

Provide **three hides minimum**: warm, cool, and humid. A good hide fits the skink snugly, with its back and sides touching the walls. Too much open space makes the hide feel unsafe, so a hide that is a tight fit is a better hide than a large cave. Blue tongues in wild habitats spend much of their time in cover, and a skink that has no sense of cover will often refuse food, pace the glass, and stress out.

Add cork bark flats, stones, and low plants to break up long sight lines. Cover at least two sides and the back of the enclosure with an opaque background. This reduces reflections and glass-surfing, and it makes the skink feel less exposed.

SECTION 4

Substrate Guide

Blue tongues dig, burrow, and root around, so substrate matters. Choose something that is soft underfoot, holds a little moisture for the humid hide area, and will not hurt the animal if some is swallowed during feeding. Keep it 2 to 4 inches deep, slightly damp in the middle zone, and dry at the basking end.

Substrate	Best for	Performance	Notes
Paper towel or unprinted newsprint	Quarantine, hatchlings, sick animals	Zero ingestion risk; easy to inspect droppings; fully disposable	Not natural and does not support digging, so use it as a short-term solution only
Cypress mulch	Adults and juveniles	Holds a bit of moisture; soft, natural look; low dust; good for burrowing	Buy plain, untreated cypress from a reptile supplier; avoid anything dyed or sold as landscape mulch
Coconut fiber blended with organic topsoil (roughly 60:40)	Juveniles and adults	Holds humidity well; ideal for the humid end and for Indonesian forms; supports burrowing	Use topsoil with no fertilizer, perlite, or vermiculite; keep damp, not wet; inspect for mold monthly
Bioactive mix (soil blend with live plants, springtails, and isopods)	Experienced keepers	Self-cleaning cycle reduces smell and waste; naturalistic	Requires a deeper layer (4 inches or more), a drainage layer, and careful humidity control; dry Australian forms need a drier mix and a drainage-friendly design
Mixed layer: cypress mulch on the warm end, coconut fiber blend on the cool and middle zones	Any size	Combines dry basking area with damp burrow area	An easy, low-cost way to create both a dry end and a humid end in one enclosure

Substrates to avoid outright

- **Cedar shavings or chips:** aromatic oils are toxic to reptiles and irritate the respiratory tract.
- **Pine shavings:** the same aromatic oil problem, plus dust.
- **Calcium sand:** marketed as digestible but packs in the gut and causes impaction (a blockage). It is not a safe calcium source.
- **Walnut shell:** sharp, abrasive, and associated with impaction and injury to the feet and mouth.
- **Fine play sand or loose desert sand:** easily swallowed during feeding and prone to impaction; blue tongues are not desert animals.
- **Crushed corn cob and alfalfa pellets:** grow mold quickly and can cause gut blockages.
- **Dyed or chemically treated landscape mulch:** contains fertilizers, pesticides, or dyes.
- **Soil containing perlite, vermiculite, fertilizer, or pesticide:** the white pellets look harmless but are swallowed along with food and are a hazard.

Spot-clean droppings and uneaten food daily. Replace the top layer of substrate at least monthly and do a full change every two to three months, or sooner if it smells.

SECTION 5

Heat, UVB & Humidity: The 3 Numbers

Blue tongues are basking lizards that evolved in warm, open country with strong sun. They need heat to digest food, UVB to process calcium, and the right humidity to shed cleanly and stay hydrated. Get these three numbers right and most of the major problems in blue tongue care simply never happen.

Parameter	Target value	How to measure it	What goes wrong when it's off
Basking surface temperature	100 to 110°F	Infrared temperature gun on the basking stone; probe thermometer on the surface at skink level	Too low: sluggish digestion, poor appetite, weak immunity; too high: thermal burns, dehydration, stress
Warm-side air temperature	85 to 95°F	Digital probe thermometer at skink level on the warm half	Below 82°F: slow digestion, food sits in the gut and ferments; above 98°F: heat stress
Cool-end air temperature	75 to 80°F	Digital probe thermometer at skink level at the cool end	Above 85°F: no real gradient, so the skink cannot cool off; below 72°F: too cold to digest
Nighttime temperature	70 to 75°F	Probe thermometer overnight with the basking lamp off	Below 68°F: immune suppression and respiratory risk; a ceramic heat emitter on a thermostat solves this
UVB output	Ferguson zone 2 to 3; roughly UVI 2.5 to 4.5 where the skink basks, with shade available	UV index meter made for reptiles, or the manufacturer's distance chart for your T5 HO tube	Too low: MBD, weak bones, poor appetite; too high (rare with T5 HO at proper distance): eye irritation, shy behavior
Ambient humidity (Australian forms)	30 to 40%	Digital hygrometer at skink level in the middle zone	Below 25%: dry skin, stuck shed; above 55% for long periods: respiratory infections and skin infections
Ambient humidity (Indonesian forms)	60 to 70%	Digital hygrometer at skink level in the middle zone	Below 50%: poor sheds and dehydration; above 80% with poor ventilation: skin and respiratory infection

Matching thermostats to heat sources

A **thermostat** is a device that reads a temperature probe and turns a heat source on and off to hold a set point. **Every heat source in a blue tongue enclosure must be on a thermostat.** Not most of them. Every one. Heat lamps fail, rooms warm up, and a lamp with no controller can climb well past 120°F. Using the wrong kind of thermostat for the wrong kind of heater is a common mistake, so match them carefully.

Heat source	Correct thermostat type	Where to put the probe	Notes
Halogen or incandescent basking flood lamp	Dimming thermostat	On the basking surface, at skink level	Dimming smoothly reduces power instead of cycling the bulb; ideal for visible light
Ceramic heat emitter	On/off or pulse-proportional thermostat	Mid-height in the warm zone, at skink level	Produces heat without light; used for night heat and ambient air; do not use a dimming thermostat on it
Radiant heat panel	Pulse-proportional or on/off thermostat	Mid-height in the warm zone	Works well for ambient warmth in cooler rooms; keep it out of the skink's reach
Heat rock	Do not use	Not applicable	Heat rocks fail unpredictably and cause serious thermal burns

Check that the thermostat's **wattage rating is higher than the total wattage of the heat source** it controls. A 150-watt bulb on a 100-watt controller is a fire waiting to happen. The same goes for the UVB fixture: **UVB tubes should never be plugged into a dimming thermostat**, because fluorescent tubes do not dim safely.

UVB: the details that matter

A **linear T5 HO tube** is the correct UVB source for a blue tongue. Choose a tube in the 10 to 12% output class from a reputable reptile lighting maker, size it to cover most of the warm half of the enclosure, and mount it per the manufacturer's distance chart. Remember that mesh lids absorb part of the UV, so a tube mounted above a screen needs to be closer than a tube mounted inside the enclosure.

Always give the skink **somewhere to get out of the UV**. The enclosure should have a gradient of UV the same way it has a gradient of heat, with the strongest output over the basking zone and shaded areas toward the cool end. A skink that cannot hide from UV is a skink under stress.

Run the UVB and the basking lamp on a **12-hour on, 12-hour off cycle** on a timer. **Replace the tube on the manufacturer's schedule**, which is typically every 12 months for T5 HO tubes (some brands say sooner). Write the installation date on the fixture with a permanent marker. UV output fades long before visible light does, so a tube that still looks bright may no longer be doing its job. A UV index meter is a worthwhile investment if you want to be certain.

Humidity: dry body, damp burrow

For Australian forms, ambient humidity of **30 to 40%** is easy to hit in a heated home. The real trick is giving the skink a **damp refuge** for when it needs one: a humid hide filled with damp sphagnum moss or damp coconut fiber, rewetted every two to three days and replaced if it smells sour. That micro-climate supports healthy shedding and hydration without turning the whole enclosure into a swamp.

Indonesian forms need **60 to 70%** across the enclosure. Use a moisture-retaining substrate such as a coconut fiber and soil blend, a larger water bowl, and a light morning misting of the substrate and decor, and keep the ventilation good so humid air never turns into stagnant air. Check the hygrometer daily either way.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Roughly half protein, nearly half vegetables and greens, and just a little fruit. Keep portions modest: blue tongues put on weight easily.

Blue tongue skinks are **omnivores**, which means they eat both animal and plant foods, and in the wild they eat a wide mix: snails and slugs, beetles, caterpillars, carrion now and then, flowers, berries, and leafy plants. A good captive diet copies that variety instead of copying a single "complete" food. That is the heart of our philosophy at Walnut Creek Supply: **Clean Fuel, No Junk**. Real whole foods, a balanced plate, and nothing mysterious on the ingredient list.

The 50/45/5 framework

Think of the skink's plate as three parts, measured roughly by volume.

Part of the plate	Share	What it is	Why it matters
Protein	About 50%	Insects, snails, cooked egg, a little lean cooked meat	Builds muscle and supports growth; the part most easily overdone
Vegetables and leafy greens	About 40 to 45%	Collards, dandelion, mustard greens, squash, shredded carrot	Fiber, vitamins, hydration, and calcium

Part of the plate	Share	What it is	Why it matters
Fruit	About 5 to 10%	Berries and melon in small amounts	Palatable and a good motivator; too much sugar leads to weight gain

A simple way to build it: take a dish about the size of the skink's head. Fill half with protein, nearly all of the rest with chopped greens and vegetables, and finish with a few pieces of fruit as a garnish. Vary the choices from meal to meal so the animal gets a broad range of nutrients.

Protein: what to offer, and how often

Protein	Role	How to offer	Notes
Dubia roaches (captive-raised)	Staple insect	Live, gut-loaded, dusted with calcium	High in protein with a good meat-to-shell ratio; do not smell or climb out of bins the way crickets do
Snails (captive-raised, or from a pesticide-free source you trust)	Favorite natural food	Whole, with the shell cracked	A classic wild blue tongue food and good for calcium; wild snails can carry parasites such as rat lungworm and pesticide residue, so captive-raised snails are the safest choice
Silkworms and hornworms	Staple or frequent treat	Live	Soft-bodied, hydrating, and easy to digest; hornworms are good for fussy eaters
Cooked egg	Regular option	Plain, hard-boiled or scrambled without oil, butter, salt, or seasoning	Soft, protein-rich, and well liked; offer a small spoonful at a time
Lean cooked meat (chicken or turkey)	Occasional	Plain, cooked through, no salt or seasoning, minced very small	A small portion only; fatty or processed meats are not suitable
Canned or wet pet food (plain, named-meat, no onion, garlic, or gravy)	Occasional component only	A spoonful mixed into the plate	See the honest note below

An honest word about canned and wet pet food. For years, canned dog and cat food has been a common blue tongue staple because skinks love it and it is cheap and convenient. It is not a terrible food, and it can be a useful tool for a fussy eater or a skink recovering from illness. But it is very high in protein and phosphorus, often high in fat, and can contain additives, flavorings, and seasonings that have no place in a reptile's diet. A long-term, high-protein canned diet is associated with **kidney strain** in reptiles, and it is a major contributor to obesity. Our recommendation is to treat it as an **occasional component** of the protein portion, not the daily staple, and never the only protein. If you use it, choose a simple, grain-free, low-fat product with a named meat as the first ingredient, no fish, no gravy, no onion or garlic, and no unexplained additives. Read the label. You would not want a mystery ingredient in your own dinner, and your skink should not have one either.

Vegetables, greens, and fruit

Food	Category	How often	Notes
Collard greens	Staple green	Every feeding	High in calcium and low in oxalates (plant compounds that bind calcium and make it unavailable); a reliable base
Dandelion greens and flowers	Staple green	Every feeding	Excellent nutrition; make sure they come from a pesticide-free source

Food	Category	How often	Notes
Mustard greens	Staple green	Every feeding	Good calcium-to-phosphorus ratio; the peppery taste is usually accepted
Butternut and acorn squash	Staple vegetable	Most feedings	Shred or cube finely; rich in vitamin A
Carrot, shredded	Staple vegetable	Most feedings	Shred finely; a good source of vitamin A and a favorite texture
Bell pepper	Regular vegetable	Several times a week	Rich in vitamin C; slice thin
Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries	Fruit	A few pieces, once or twice a week	Keep the total fruit portion to 5 to 10% of the plate

What never to feed

Food	Why it is dangerous
Avocado	Contains persin, which is toxic to many reptiles
Rhubarb	Very high in oxalic acid; toxic
Onion, garlic, leeks, chives	Sulfur compounds damage red blood cells
Wild-caught insects	Carry parasites and pesticide residue; also unsafe because of what they may have eaten
Fireflies (lightning bugs)	Contain lucibufagins, a toxin that is lethal to reptiles even in tiny amounts
Excess spinach, beet greens, and Swiss chard	High in oxalates, which tie up calcium and can weaken bones when these greens are fed regularly
Processed human food: deli meat, hot dogs, chips, candy, anything salted, seasoned, or sweetened	High in salt, fat, and additives; harmful to the kidneys and liver

Supplement schedule

Even a varied diet needs a little help. Use these supplements lightly, and measure carefully rather than dumping powder on the food.

Supplement	Schedule	Notes
Plain calcium powder (without D3)	Dust insects and lightly sprinkle greens at most feedings	Calcium without D3 is safe to use frequently because the body takes only what it needs
Reptile multivitamin	1 to 2 times per week	Replaces calcium dusting on those days, not in addition to it, so you are not doubling up on powder

Feeding schedule by age

Life stage	Age	How often	What to offer	Notes
Hatchling	0 to 6 months	Daily	Small insects, finely chopped greens, a pinch of fruit	Offer all they will eat in 15 to 20 minutes
Juvenile	6 to 18 months	Daily , tapering toward every other day as growth slows	Larger insects, snails, greens, squash	Begin watching body condition closely at this stage
Sub-adult	18 to 24 months	Every other day	Full 50/45/5 plate	Gradually move toward the adult schedule
Adult	2 years and older	2 to 3 times per week	Full 50/45/5 plate, a head-sized portion	The most common mistake is feeding adults like juveniles

Offer food in the morning once the skink has warmed up under the basking lamp. A cold skink does not digest well. Remove uneaten fresh food after a few hours and always keep fresh water available.

Preventing obesity

Blue tongues look wonderfully chunky, which makes it very easy to miss an animal that is actually overweight. Learn the signs of a healthy body shape:

- A visible but gentle **waist** behind the front legs
- A tail base that is thick but firm, not bulging
- A belly that stays off the ground when the skink is standing
- No folds of fat on the neck or behind the legs

To keep your skink lean, weigh it **monthly** and record the number. Feed adults only **two to three times a week**. Keep fatty items like waxworms, mealworms, and canned food to a minimum. Count treats as part of the plate. If your skink is gaining weight, cut back on protein first and keep the vegetables generous. Increase enclosure size and enrichment so it has more to do than eat. A lean blue tongue is a healthier, longer-lived blue tongue.

Water

A wide, shallow, heavy bowl of fresh water should be available at all times. Blue tongues drink, soak, and often defecate in their bowl, so refresh it daily and scrub it weekly. Dehydration shows up as sunken eyes, wrinkled skin, and thick or chalky urates.

***Shop the food and supplies:** Browse Reptile & Amphibian Food and Live Feed Delivered!.*

SECTION 7

Shedding & Brumation

Shedding

Blue tongue skinks shed their skin **in patches** rather than in one piece like a snake. You will see dull, slightly gray or whitish areas of skin that begin to flake or peel away over a few days. **Juveniles shed often** because they are growing quickly, sometimes every month or two. **Adults shed less frequently**, typically a few times a year.

A healthy shed is nearly invisible. The skink may soak more often, spend more time in the humid hide, and look a little dull, but it keeps eating and moving normally. Patchy shedding on the body, then the head, then the legs and tail is normal.

The thing to watch for is **dysecdysis**, the clinical term for difficult or incomplete shedding. The most common trouble spots are the **toes and the tail tip**. Retained shed can wrap around a toe like a tiny tourniquet, cutting off circulation, and over time the toe can die and fall off. Check every toe and the tail tip after each shed.

For stuck shed, give a **15 to 20 minute soak** in shallow, lukewarm water (about belly-deep, 80 to 85°F), then gently rub the loosened skin with a damp cotton swab or a soft finger. **Never pull dry shed**, because it can tear the new skin underneath. If the humid hide has dried out, rewet it, because that is the most common cause. If shed keeps sticking, check your humidity and hydration, and book a vet visit if a toe or the tail tip looks tight, swollen, or discolored.

Brumation

Brumation is the reptile version of hibernation: a seasonal slowdown in which the animal eats less, moves less, and sleeps more. Blue tongues from southern parts of Australia do this in winter, and many captive adults still feel the seasonal pull even in a warm home. The classic signs are shorter days spent basking, longer days spent hiding, a drop in appetite, and sometimes a refusal to eat for several weeks.

It is easy to confuse brumation with illness, so here is how to tell them apart.

What you see	More likely brumation	More likely illness
Age and condition	Healthy adult in good body condition	Juvenile, thin animal, or any age with other symptoms
Timing	Fall or winter, as days shorten	Any time of year, often suddenly
Behavior	Calm, sleeps in the hide, wakes and walks if disturbed	Lethargic, weak, unresponsive, or restless in a bad way
Eyes and breathing	Clear eyes, quiet breathing	Sunken or crusty eyes, wheezing, bubbles, open-mouth breathing
Body weight	Stable or slowly declining within a few percent	Rapid weight loss, visibly thin tail base
Droppings	Few, because little is eaten	Runny, bloody, or foul-smelling

If you suspect brumation, **do not switch off the heat or lights**. Keep the temperature gradient available and the water fresh, and let the skink choose. Reducing the photoperiod slightly (to about 10 hours) is common. Offer food every few days but do not insist, and weigh monthly. A loss of more than about **10% of body weight**, or any other symptom from the illness column, is a reason to call the vet. Skinks under one year old should not be allowed to slow down this way, so a young skink that stops eating needs a vet visit rather than a wait-and-see approach. If you plan to let an adult brumate, a pre-winter vet check and fecal exam is a smart habit.

SECTION 8

Common Challenges & Solutions

Retained shed (dysecdysis)

What you see: dull, stuck patches of old skin, and especially a ring of shed around a toe or the tail tip. **Why:** humidity too low, no humid hide, dehydration, or a skin infection. **What to do:** rewet the humid hide, offer a 15 to 20 minute lukewarm soak, and gently rub loosened skin away; never pull dry shed. **When to call a vet:** if a toe or tail tip looks swollen, dark, or constricted, or shed keeps sticking after you have corrected humidity.

Obesity

What you see: no waist, fat bulging behind the legs and at the tail base, a belly that drags, and a skink that seems slow or unwilling to explore. **Why:** adult-style portions fed on a juvenile schedule, too much canned food, fatty insects, and too little room to move. **What to do:** cut feedings to two a week, trim protein first, keep vegetables generous, remove waxworms and mealworms, and weigh monthly. **When to call a vet:** if weight keeps climbing despite changes, or the skink is breathing heavily or cannot move comfortably.

Metabolic bone disease (MBD)

What you see: a soft or rubbery jaw, tremors or twitching in the legs, bowed limbs, a lumpy spine or tail, reluctance to walk, and in advanced cases fractures. **Why:** the skink cannot absorb enough calcium, nearly always from weak or expired UVB, poor distance from the lamp, or a calcium-poor diet. **What to do:** replace the UVB tube, fix the distance, confirm the basking temperature, and restart calcium dusting. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign of tremors or jaw softness; early cases recover well, and advanced cases leave permanent damage.

Respiratory infection

What you see: wheezing, bubbles or mucus at the nose or mouth, open-mouth breathing, clicking sounds, and lethargy. **Why:** temperatures too low, humidity too high or too stagnant, dusty substrate, or stress. **What to do:** check the basking and cool-end temperatures right away, bring humidity down, and improve ventilation. **When to call a vet:** immediately. A respiratory infection in a reptile can progress to pneumonia within days and needs prescription medication.

Mites

What you see: tiny black or red specks moving on the skin, especially around the eyes, ears, and leg joints; dark dots floating in the water bowl; frequent soaking; scratching; rough skin. **Why:** mites enter on new animals, feeder insects, or contaminated supplies. **What to do:** isolate the skink, move it to a bare paper-towel setup, discard the old substrate, and scrub and disinfect the enclosure completely; do not apply sprays without veterinary advice. **When to call a vet:** at the first sighting. Treatment is easy when it is caught early and difficult when mites are heavy.

Mouth rot (infectious stomatitis)

What you see: swollen, red gums, cheesy yellow-white material in the mouth, drooling, bad breath, and a skink that refuses food or drops it. **Why:** bacteria entering through a small injury, usually in a skink that is too cold, too stressed, or poorly fed. **What to do:** check temperatures and hygiene, and do not try to scrape away the debris yourself. **When to call a vet:** as soon as you notice it. It needs antibiotics and often cleaning under sedation.

Impaction

What you see: straining with no result, no droppings for ten days or more despite normal feeding, a swollen or hard belly, a loss of appetite, and sometimes dragging or weakness in the back legs. **Why:** swallowed substrate, oversized food, dehydration, or

temperatures too cold to digest. **What to do:** confirm warmth, offer a 15 to 20 minute lukewarm soak, and do not give oils or home remedies. **When to call a vet:** the same day if you see weakness or a swollen belly, and within a few days for a missed dropping alone.

Kidney strain from excess protein

What you see: greater thirst, lethargy, poor appetite, swelling in the legs or belly, and stiff or swollen joints in advanced cases. **Why:** years of high-protein feeding, especially canned pet food and frequent insects, combined with chronic dehydration. **What to do:** reduce protein to the 50% target, limit canned food, keep water fresh, offer regular soaks, and bring the diet back into balance. **When to call a vet:** within a week for bloodwork. Kidney damage develops silently and is far easier to prevent than to treat.

Thermal burns

What you see: red, blistered, peeling, or darkened skin, usually on the belly or back; reluctance to move; scabs. **Why:** a bulb mounted too close, a heat lamp with no thermostat, a heat rock, or a heat mat with no controller. **What to do:** correct the heat source immediately, keep the skink on clean paper towel, and keep the area dry. **When to call a vet:** any blistering or open skin, because burns infect easily and heal slowly.

Tail injury

What you see: a wound, kink, or missing portion of the tail. **Why:** a pinch in a door or lid, a grab from a child, a bite, or extreme stress. **What to do:** never grab, lift, or restrain a blue tongue by the tail. A tail that is lost or damaged under extreme stress regrows poorly, usually as a short, blunt stub. Keep a wound clean and dry on paper towel. **When to call a vet:** for any bleeding, swelling, or discoloration.

Internal parasites

What you see: runny or foul droppings, visible worms, weight loss despite eating, and a dull, listless animal. **Why:** wild-caught feeders, contaminated food, or previous exposure at a breeder or store. **What to do:** collect a fresh dropping in a clean sealed container and bring it to the vet for a fecal exam; never give over-the-counter dewormers. **When to call a vet:** at any sign, and once a year as a routine screening.

Quick reference

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Vet urgency
Stuck shed on toes or tail	Low humidity	Soak; rewet humid hide	If toe is swollen or dark
Bulging waist, slow movement	Obesity	Cut portions; weigh monthly	If weight keeps rising
Soft jaw, tremors, bowed legs	MBD	Replace UVB; calcium	Within days
Wheezing, bubbles, open mouth	Respiratory infection	Check temperatures	Same day
Specks around eyes or in water	Mites	Isolate; clean everything	At first sighting
Swollen gums, cheesy material	Mouth rot	Check husbandry	Within a day
No stool 10+ days, swollen belly	Impaction	Warm soak	Same day if weak
Thirst, swelling, poor appetite	Kidney strain	Reduce protein	Within a week
Blistered or peeling skin	Thermal burn	Fix heat source	Any open skin

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Vet urgency
Damaged or lost tail	Injury or stress	Keep clean; do not grab	Any bleeding or swelling
Loose stool, weight loss	Parasites	Fecal exam	Within a week

SECTION 9

Handling

A calm blue tongue skink is one of the great pleasures of reptile keeping. Most tolerate handling well, and many will relax on your lap and explore. But even the gentlest skink is a ground animal that dislikes being picked up from above, and trust is built one gentle session at a time.

How to pick up and support a blue tongue

Approach from the side, at eye level, and slide a hand under the chest. Never swoop down from above, because that is how a hawk arrives. **Support the whole body:** one hand under the chest and front legs, the other under the hips and the base of the tail, so the legs never dangle. Keep the skink close to your body or low over a lap or blanket in case it wriggles. **Never grab or lift it by the tail.**

Keep early sessions to five or ten minutes. Let the skink explore across your hands and lap, and put it back before it gets fidgety.

Reading the defensive display

Signal	What it means
Hissing with a flattened, widened body	"I am scared and want space." Pause and give it a minute
Mouth open, blue tongue showing	Full defensive bluff; put it down gently or back away
Tail curled or stiff, body rigid	High stress; end the session
Quick darting movements, scrabbling	Wants to escape; support its body and lower it
Slow tongue flicks and calm walking	Curious and relaxed
Lying still on your lap, eyes half closed	Content

A bite is rare, but when it happens it is firm and the skink may hold on. Stay calm, do not yank, and gently wait for the grip to release.

When not to handle

Skip handling for the first 48 to 72 hours at home, during a shed, right after eating (wait a few hours), when the skink is sick or recovering, during brumation, and whenever it is hiding and hissing. Always wash your hands before and after, and keep the skink away from food prep areas.

Children and families

Children can enjoy blue tongues, but under adult supervision. Keep the child seated on the floor, with the skink supported over a blanket, and teach them to hold it gently and never by the tail. Children under five should not handle reptiles because of the risk of Salmonella. Wash hands for 20 seconds afterward, every single time.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Check basking, warm-side, cool-end temperatures and humidity
Daily	Confirm the lights and UVB are on their 12-hour timer
Daily	Refresh the water bowl and spot-clean droppings and uneaten food
2 to 3 times a week (adults)	Offer a measured meal with calcium dusting
Daily	Observe alertness, posture, eyes, breathing, and appetite
Weekly	Scrub the water and feeding dishes; moisten the middle zone
Weekly	Check the toes and tail tip for retained shed
Weekly	Handling session of 10 to 15 minutes
Monthly	Weigh the skink and record the number
Monthly	Replace the top layer of substrate; clean all hides
Every 2 to 3 months	Full substrate change and enclosure disinfection
Every 12 months	Replace the T5 HO UVB tube (or per manufacturer)
Annually	Exotic vet wellness visit with a fecal exam

SECTION 11

When to See a Vet

Blue tongues are stoic and hide illness well. By the time symptoms show, the problem has often been building for weeks. **When you are not sure whether to call, call.**

Go today, same day or emergency:

- Open-mouth breathing, wheezing, bubbles at the nose, or labored breathing
- Any prolapse (tissue protruding from the vent)
- Seizures, circling, loss of coordination, or unresponsiveness
- Blistering burns or open wounds
- A broken limb or visibly deformed jaw
- A swollen belly with weakness or dragging hind legs
- Heavy bleeding or a damaged tail with swelling
- Swollen, pus-filled gums or a mouth that will not close

Book within a few days:

- Soft jaw or tremors
- Loss of appetite for more than two to three weeks outside of brumation
- Weight loss of more than 10%
- No droppings for ten days or more
- Loose, foul, or bloody droppings
- Eyes that are sunken, cloudy, or discharging
- Mites, lumps, or retained shed that will not clear
- A sudden change in temperament

Bring a short temperature log, your supplement schedule, a fresh dropping in a sealed container, and a photo of the enclosure to every appointment.

SECTION 12

FAQ

What do blue tongue skinks eat?

Blue tongue skinks are omnivores, and a healthy adult plate is roughly 50% protein, 40 to 45% vegetables and leafy greens, and 5 to 10% fruit. Good proteins include captive-raised dubia roaches, snails, silkworms, hornworms, and cooked egg, with lean cooked meat and canned pet food only now and then. Collard, dandelion, and mustard greens, squash, and shredded carrot make a solid vegetable base, and berries or melon work as occasional fruit. Never feed avocado, rhubarb, onion, garlic, wild-caught insects, fireflies, or processed human food, and go easy on spinach and beet greens because of their oxalates.

How big do blue tongue skinks get?

Most adult blue tongue skinks reach 18 to 24 inches in total length and weigh roughly one to two pounds, though a few grow heavier. They are wide, stocky lizards, so they look bigger than their length suggests. Shinglebacks are a smaller, more specialized species. Most captive animals reach adult size within about two years, and a healthy weight is lean and muscular rather than round.

How long do blue tongue skinks live?

With good care, blue tongue skinks commonly live 15 to 20 years, and some live longer. That is a long-term commitment, comparable to a dog. The best ways to protect that lifespan are correct UVB, a proper temperature gradient, a lean body weight, a varied diet with limited canned food, and an annual visit to a vet who sees reptiles.

What size tank does a blue tongue skink need?

One adult needs a minimum of 4 feet long by 2 feet deep by 1.5 to 2 feet tall, and bigger is better. Floor space matters far more than height because blue tongues walk and dig, and they do not climb. A standard 40-gallon aquarium is too small for an adult, though it can serve a hatchling for a short time. Whatever you choose, make sure the lid or doors lock securely.

Do blue tongue skinks need UVB?

Yes. Blue tongue skinks need UVB to make vitamin D3 and absorb calcium, and without it they develop metabolic bone disease. Use a linear T5 HO tube suited to Ferguson zone 2 to 3, mounted at the distance the manufacturer recommends, with shade available so the skink can leave the light. Run it on a 12-hour cycle and replace it on schedule, because UVB output fades long before the light looks dim.

What temperature does a blue tongue skink need?

Provide a basking surface of 100 to 110°F, warm-side air of 85 to 95°F, a cool end of 75 to 80°F, and nights of 70 to 75°F. Measure the basking surface with an infrared temperature gun and the air with probe thermometers. Put every heat source on a thermostat, and never use heat rocks.

Do blue tongue skinks bite?

Rarely, but they can. A blue tongue's usual response to alarm is to hiss, flatten its body, and flash its blue tongue, and a bite generally comes only after those warnings are ignored. The bite is firm and broad-jawed, and it can be sore, but it seldom causes serious injury. Approach calmly from the side, support the full body, and never grab the tail, and bites are very uncommon.

Are blue tongue skinks good pets for beginners?

Yes, they are one of the better lizards for a dedicated beginner, mostly thanks to their calm nature and sturdy build. They still need a large enclosure, proper UVB, a thermostat-controlled heat gradient, a measured diet, and a reptile vet, so they are not no-effort

pets. A keeper who does the research and keeps up with the basics will find them forgiving and rewarding. Start with a captive-bred Northern or Eastern, and save the humidity-hungry Indonesian forms and the Shingleback for later.

Why is my blue tongue skink not eating?

The most common causes are temperatures that are too low, a new home that is still settling in, an upcoming shed, seasonal brumation, or a diet that is boring or too rich. Check the basking and cool-end temperatures, confirm the UVB is working, and offer a favorite such as a snail or cooked egg. Brumation is normal in healthy adults in fall and winter, but a young skink, a thin skink, or one with other symptoms needs a vet. If your skink has refused food for more than two to three weeks outside brumation, book an appointment.

Can two blue tongue skinks live together?

No. Blue tongue skinks are solitary, and keeping them together leads to stress, fighting, bites, uneven food access, and injury. Males in particular can be very aggressive toward each other, and even a male and female pair can cause injuries and unwanted breeding. Give each skink its own enclosure, and consider a second skink only if you can supply a second full-sized setup.

Ready to shop? Start with *Reptiles & Amphibians*. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.
Not sure this is the right pet? Compare your options in our *Reptile Guide*.

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not at checkout. Not as an option. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible pet ownership and community care are the same promise made in two directions.

For blue tongue keepers, that means something close to home. These are animals that thrive on patience, routine, and honest care, and your reading this guide shows you are willing to give them that. Every enclosure you set up, every careful meal you measure, and every vet visit you keep is part of a long and rewarding partnership.

We are a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and stock the clean-label, USA-made goods we would put in front of our own pets, with **no mystery ingredients** and no unsafe substrates. If you have a question about your skink's heat gradient, UVB setup, feeding plan, or just want to tell us about your new arrival, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We would love to hear from you.

Welcome to 15 to 20 years with one of the friendliest lizards in the hobby.

*From our family to yours, **Walnut Creek Supply** — Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania walnutcreeksupply.com*