



The Tortoise Sanctuary

International Tortoise Association
71 South Road , Sully,
Vale of Glamorgan,
CF64 5SL
Phone: 02920 531282



Guidance Document

Hibernation :

Tortoise hibernate safely at a temperature of between no lower than 2 degrees and no higher than 6 degrees. If the temperature rises above this the tortoise will wake up and move around using up valuable energy saved up before run down. Your tortoise will not be warm enough to eat and if not warmed up very soon will more than likely die. As they are cold blooded reptiles it takes 3 to 4 weeks to complete their run down, they have to clear their stomach/intestines and bladder of all waste as this will continue to rot while the tortoise sleeps, this is a slow process and tortoise know they have to do it.

Put your tortoise in a secure pen in your garden with a house so they have protection from weather and predators, put them in a box over night and bring them into your garage as if they do dig down over night you may not find them the next day and you will have to leave them until they wake in spring. Do this every day for at least 3 weeks.

If your tortoise just sleeps or is digging right into the ground then after 2 weeks you just might as well let them go into hibernation. After 3 weeks or at a time you are happy, get a plastic box and line the bottom with newspaper then fill it with shredded paper, put your tortoise in this box and put it into a cold garage or shed just off the floor to prevent the extreme cold penetrating through the box. If the garage/shed gets too cold you can cover the box with tarpaulin/blanket/carpet or anything for protection. You can pick a tortoise up when hibernating and this will not usually bother them as they will settle down as soon as you put them back. To check your tortoise is ok during hibernating touch the back leg, you should get a response, they will pull the back leg in or even hiss this is normal and you will know it is alive, next check the nose for mucus or wetness, check the eyes are still closed and not weeping and also check there is no wetness around the back end of your tortoise, if after the check you find anything you are not happy with then don't risk leaving your tortoise any longer wake and warm immediately. Your tortoise will usually wake when the temperature is warmer but if you are happy they have been in hibernation long enough you can wake them up yourself. Put your heat lamp on in the vivarium put your tortoise in at the cold end, as they wake they will move towards the heat, when awake offer food this may take a few days before they eat but don't worry. Give them a bath in warm water this also helps.

There is always a risk during hibernation, you can not see inside a tortoise so have to keep a close eye and don't just leave until spring. Trust your instinct if you are not happy or think there is something not right get them up.