

REFERENCE GUIDE

# Bearded Dragon Feeding Schedule

By age, from hatchling to adult

---

A printable quick-reference guide covering insect frequency, salad routine, and calcium dusting from hatchling through adulthood. Includes body-condition checks, a troubleshooting table for food refusal, and the diet ratio shift that prevents fatty liver disease in adult dragons.

[beardiehusbandry.com](https://beardiehusbandry.com)

SECTION ONE

## The Full Schedule by Age

The numbers below cover every stage from hatchling to adult. Calcium dusting frequency assumes plain calcium without D3 as the primary supplement, which works correctly under a functioning T5 HO UVB setup.




Age	Insect Frequency	Per Session	Salad	Calcium Dusting
0–2 months	3× daily	10–20 per session <i>10–15 min window</i>	Daily — available but optional	Every feed
2–4 months	3× daily	10–20 per session <i>10–15 min window</i>	Daily — encourage but do not force	Every feed
4–6 months	2× daily	15–20 per session	Daily — offer before insects	Every feed
6–9 months	Once daily	15–20 per session	Daily — offer before insects	5× per week
9–12 months	Once daily, reducing to every other day	10–15 per session	Daily — primary food source now	5× per week
12 months +	2–3× per week	8–15 per session	Daily — non-negotiable	3–4× per week

**⚠ Insect size rule applies from day one**

Never offer a feeder wider than the gap between your dragon's eyes, regardless of age. Oversized feeders cause gut impaction in hatchlings within hours. When in doubt, go one size smaller.

## The Diet Ratio Shift That Prevents Fatty Liver Disease

The most important dietary change across a dragon's life is the shift from insect-heavy to salad-heavy feeding. Missing this transition is the primary cause of obesity and fatty liver disease in captive dragons.

Baby	Juvenile	Adult
0–6 MONTHS	6–12 MONTHS	12 MONTHS +
		
Heavy insects, salad optional but offered daily.	Transition window. Salad before insects at every session.	Salad daily, insects 2–3× per week only.

## What Each Stage Actually Looks Like

### HATCHLING

#### Under 4 Months

Three sessions per day, 10–15 minutes each. Healthy hatchlings under two months can eat 30–50 small insects across all three sessions combined.

- Small crickets or black soldier fly larvae only under 3 months
- Dubias fine from 2–3 months once dragon is large enough
- Mealworms not until 12+ months — genuine impaction risk
- Salad bowl in enclosure every day, even if completely ignored

### GROWING JUVENILE

#### 4 to 12 Months (the transition window)

Gradually stepping down insect frequency while stepping up salad. Nothing changes abruptly — this is a sliding scale, not a switch.

- 4 months: insects twice daily
- 8 months: once daily is enough
- 11–12 months: transitioning to 2–3× per week
- Always offer salad before insects during this window

### ADULT

#### 12 Months and Over

Insects two to three times per week, 8–15 per session. Salad every morning without exception. Monday/Wednesday/Friday insects works well because it's easy to remember and prevents the drift back toward daily feeding.

- Salad first thing in the morning, before basking light warms dragon fully
- A slightly cool, slightly hungry dragon investigates the bowl
- Once basking spot hits temperature, salad window largely closes

#### Offer salad before insects during the juvenile stage

A hungry dragon will investigate the bowl before bugs arrive. Dragons that always get insects first learn to wait and start refusing salad — a habit that becomes very hard to break by adulthood.


#### Gut load every insect batch

An unloaded cricket has an inverse Ca:P ratio that works against calcium absorption regardless of how much powder you dust. Crickets need 24 hours to load. Dubias need 48–72 hours. Pull the batch the day before a feeding, not the morning of.

## Use Body Condition, Not Just Age

A 12-month-old that's undersized should not automatically move to the adult schedule just because they hit 12 months chronologically. A dragon hitting adult size at 8–9 months needs the adult schedule early or weight gain begins. Body condition at the tail base is the more reliable trigger than the calendar.

<p><b>Underweight</b></p> <p>Concave tail base. Visible angular hip bones. Tail itself may look thin along its length.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> <p><b>Daily insect feeding regardless of age until weight catches up.</b></p>	<p><b>Healthy</b></p> <p>Rounded, slightly fleshy tail base. No sharp angles at the hips. Tail tapers smoothly.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> <p><b>Follow the age-appropriate schedule.</b></p>	<p><b>Overweight</b></p> <p>Fat pads bulging at tail base and hips. Body may look squat. Belly rests heavy on ground.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #ccc;"/> <p><b>Immediate insect reduction. Drop to adult schedule early if still juvenile.</b></p>
---	---	--

 **Check the tail base, not just the scale**

Weight alone doesn't tell you everything — some dragons are naturally bigger-framed. The shape of the tail base where it meets the body is a cleaner read on whether the current schedule is working.

### When the Calendar and Body Tell You Different Things

Track both. A dragon's chronological age sets the starting schedule. Their body condition tells you whether to adjust it up or down. Check the tail base monthly — takes five seconds and catches problems well before they become visible on a scale.

What You're Seeing	Action
<b>12-month-old, size of typical 8-month-old</b>	Stay on more frequent insect feeding until length and weight catch up. Do not drop to adult schedule yet.
<b>9-month-old at full adult size, healthy weight</b>	Begin adult schedule early. Continuing daily insect feeding will drive weight gain from this point.
<b>Adult with visible fat pads at tail base</b>	Reduce insect frequency immediately. Confirm salad is going in daily and being eaten.
<b>Any age with concave tail base, angular hips</b>	Increase frequency by one stage on the schedule. Vet check if no improvement in 3–4 weeks.

## When Your Dragon Stops Eating on Schedule

Food refusal almost always has a predictable cause tied to age, season, or enclosure temperature. Temperature first, behaviour second.

### ⚠️ Check basking temperature before anything else

A basking surface below 95°F cannot support digestion. Appetite drops are the first sign. A failed thermostat, blown bulb, or cool room can all push the enclosure below threshold. Verify with a temperature gun, not a stick-on thermometer.

Situation	Most Likely Cause	What to Do
<b>Adult refusing salad, accepting insects</b>	Bug addiction — trained to wait for insects	Withhold insects 3–5 days. Salad only. A healthy adult will not starve itself.
<b>Refusing all food, October to January</b>	Brumation — seasonal slowdown from light reduction	Weigh weekly. Stable weight is fine. Rapid loss needs a vet.
<b>Juvenile refusing insects at 7–9 months</b>	Natural protein appetite drop — transition starting	Move to once daily, increase salad. Stable weight = normal.
<b>Refusing food while in shed</b>	Shedding suppresses appetite at any age	Offer but don't force. Appetite returns 1–2 days after shed. Check toes and tail tip for retained shed.
<b>Refusing food, actively restless (Feb–Apr)</b>	Breeding season hormones	Check temps first. If correct, likely hormonal. Offer daily, don't force.
<b>Refusing food, lethargic, at any age</b>	Temperature problem or illness	Verify basking 100–110°F. If temps correct and refusal passes 5–7 days, vet visit warranted.

### Holding the Line on Salad Days

Offering insects when an adult refuses salad is the most counterproductive move you can make. Dragons are not stupid. If refusing salad reliably produces insects within twenty minutes, they keep refusing salad.

A well-fed adult is not at any risk from three to five days of salad-only feeding. That is typically all the time it takes for a stubborn dragon to start eating the bowl in front of them.

### Brumation vs illness — weight loss is the tell

A brumating dragon can stop eating almost entirely for 6–8 weeks. That alone is not a warning. Losing more than 5–10% of body weight over a month is. Weekly weigh-ins on kitchen scales tell you which side of the line you're on.

## Your Weekly Feeding Checklist

---

- Confirm today's age band** against the schedule table. Insect frequency and per-session count should match.

---

- Salad in first thing in the morning** before the basking light fully warms the dragon.

---

- Gut loaded insects only.** Crickets pulled 24 hours before. Dubias pulled 48–72 hours before.

---

- Insect size check** — no feeder wider than the gap between the eyes.

---

- Body condition check monthly.** Rounded tail base is healthy. Angular or fat-padded means adjust.

---

- Basking surface verified with a temp gun** at 100–110°F. Stick-on thermometers don't count.

---

- Hold the line on salad days.** No insects to bribe a stubborn adult.

*This guide is for general husbandry reference only and does not constitute veterinary advice. Food refusal combined with lethargy beyond 1–2 days, rapid weight loss, or signs of impaction warrants a reptile-savvy vet visit.*

**[beardiehusbandry.com](http://beardiehusbandry.com)**