



Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection

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Wild-Caught Prey

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Many reptile owners think that they can save money by catching prey in the wild to feed to their reptiles. While this is relatively safe for reptiles that live in the same habitat as the prey comes from, it carries with it some risk for native species and may be fatal to non-native species.

Not all prey is safe to eat. While birds and mammals may be relatively safe, many species of arthropods and amphibians may be quite toxic. Fish may be toxic for another reason--toxic industrial and agricultural runoff into the local sources of water. Arthropods may be contaminated by yard and garden herbicides and pesticides. Many mammals and birds may be carrying high levels of such toxins as these chemicals bioaccumulate in the body fat the higher up the food chain one goes.

Besides natural and man-made toxins is another risk, that of parasites. Native reptile species that co-evolved with wild prey species also CO-evolved some immunity to the internal and external parasites of their prey. Feed an African lizard a wild North American rodent, however, and you may potentially kill the lizard who has no defenses against the parasitic, commensal or saprophytic organisms living in and on the rodent.

Prey bred especially for captive reptiles are raised (or should be) in clean environments from generations of captive bred stock. A careful breeder knows how to properly feed, water, and house his prey to produce healthy feeders. Freezing the prey after killing them also helps ensure that any residual parasites are killed before the feeder is fed out.

Excerpted from Chapter 7, Feeding and Nutrition, of my master's thesis, Reptiles: A Teacher's Guide to their care and keeping in the classroom (1997, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA).