



# GO CRAZY FOR GOPHER TORTOISES

Gopher tortoises are brownish gray land turtles about the size of a Frisbee. They are **reptiles**, which means they have a backbone, scaly skin, lungs to breathe and are cold blooded.

Gopher tortoises dig long, deep **burrows** that protect them from sun, fire and predators. They share their burrows with over 350 other animals, including insects, amphibians, other reptiles, birds and mammals. They are a very important species since they provide homes for so many other animals.

To survive, gopher tortoises need dry, sandy areas with few trees so they can dig their burrows, plus low growing plants that supply food for their **herbivorous** diet. They like to eat grasses, prickly pear cactuses and pine needles. Sandy soil is also a great place for female tortoises to lay their eggs, which they bury in the ground. After about three months a lemon-yellow baby hatches from each of approximately six eggs. The hatchlings will live temporarily in an adults burrow or create their own.

Gopher tortoises are a **Threatened Species**. That is because their **habitat** is often destroyed by development, or when trees are allowed to grow up and shade out their food. In addition, many get hit by cars when crossing roads and their eggs and babies are eaten by predators.

## Gopher Tortoise Poop

Note the undigested grass and pine needles.



Domed Shell

Elephant-like  
Hind Feet

Shovel-like Forelimbs  
for Digging

Lemon Yellow Baby  
Tortoise (hatchling)

