

Houston Zoo at Home

TURTLES & TORTOISES

Turtle Treats

Ages 3 and up

As cold-blooded reptiles, turtles rely on the temperature of the air around them to keep themselves from becoming too hot or too cold. Depending on the species of turtle, they will eat anything from earthworms, grubs, snails, beetles and caterpillars to grasses, fruit, berries, mushrooms and flowers. This activity will help you explore areas around your home as well as get a tasty snack, just like a turtle!

Materials Needed:

- Small plates or napkins
- “turtle snacks” such as apples, pear, or cucumber for the body and grapes, blueberries, raisins, cheese or pepperoni for the head, legs, and scutes (scales)
- Toothpicks
- Partner to play with

Steps:

1. First, create a few of your own “turtle snacks.” Any example of a turtle snack using apple slices, grapes, and mini-chocolate chips is below, but you can get creative. If you do not want to shape your snack like a turtle, you can still play with whatever snack you’d like.
2. With the help of a family member or a partner, split your snack onto two or three different plates or napkins. Have your partner place each snack portion in a different area of your home or safely outside. Some can be in the sun, some in the shade.
3. Once the snacks are placed, you can begin to hunt your snack down. Your partner can give hints by saying “warmer” as you get closer and “colder” if you start to move away from your snack.
4. When you find your snack, you get to eat it! In each location, pay attention to whether you feel warmer or cooler in each space that you visit. If you were a turtle, where would you most want to eat your snack?

Level Up Challenge: Instead of providing hints, see if you can find your snack on your own!

Share your project with us!

Tag your photo using #HoustonZoo or email us your story at communications@houstonzoo.org.

Turtle –Who?

Ages 8 and up

Turtle, tortoise, or terrapin? Texas is home to many of these shelled reptile friends, so it can often be hard to tell them apart. We have 28 species of turtle and just one tortoise and one terrapin species found throughout the state. One tool that scientists use or create to identify an unknown species is called a dichotomous key, or a series of clues or statements about a plant, animal or rocks features that help us identify them. They are especially helpful when two species are very similar. This tool helps us take a close look at details we may have missed when we first look or observe something!

Practice your turtle and tortoise identification skills below with a family member. A few of the more commonly found species have been included that you could see the next time you go on a hike or visit the beach!

Materials Needed:

Paper

Pencils

print out of turtle images (optional)

crayons or paint (optional)

Look at the images below. How would you describe each of the turtle shells?

1. Try and write down some of the differences between turtle shells of our local species. It could be the color, shape, or designs that really set them apart.
2. If you print the images out, you can even spend some time grouping photos by similar traits or features that are very striking and different. This may be beneficial later.
3. Next, have a family member pick one species that you will try and guess.
4. You can ask them questions about the observable traits of the turtle, such as “Does it have ridges on the shell?” or “Does it have claws on its feet?” to try and narrow down the options. The goal of each set of questions is to help you confidently eliminate one or more species.
5. Once you think you have narrowed it down to the last remaining turtle that meets all the criteria from your questions, ask to see if it’s the correct species. Were you right?
6. Take turns selecting different species to describe and guess. Each round, your investigation skills and questions will get better and better! Level up or down for additional fun!

Level Up Challenge: Try making your own dichotomous key at home! You can use them to describe and differentiate anything from your shoes, to food, or even toys. Here’s some information on how to start: <https://www.education.com/science-fair/article/dichotomous-key/>

Learn more about our Texas species: <https://tpwmagazine.com/nature/media/Turtles.pdf>

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SNAPPING TURTLES



Common snapping turtle



Alligator snapping turtle



Red-eared slider



Big Bend slider

BOX TURTLES



Ornate box turtle



Desert box turtle



Three-toed box turtle

SEA (MARINE) TURTLES



Kemp's Ridley sea turtle



Green sea turtle



Hawksbill sea turtle



Loggerhead sea turtle

TORTOISES & TERRAPINS



Texas tortoise



Texas Diamondback terrapin

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