

# Pet Gazette

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## What is the Difference Between A Tortoise And A Turtle?

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Terrapins, turtles and tortoises are all four-legged reptiles that have hard outer shells and scaly skin. People use the three names interchangeably regarding these reptiles, however, there are clear distinctions between the three based on the environments they live in.

The terrapin is a freshwater reptile, a turtle is a sea reptile and a tortoise is a reptile that lives on land. All three animals are similar in that they breathe air through lungs and have shells that are made up of a two-piece frame covered with soft skin or horny plates. The lower side of the shell is called the plastron and covers the belly of the animal. The upper side of the shell, called the carapace, covers the back of the animal. There are spaces or openings between the two sides of the shell where the animal can protrude its head, legs and tail. This outer shell makes these animals very different from other types of reptiles like crocodilians, lizards and snakes. While most of their senses are very good, turtles, tortoises and terrapins have terrible hearing. They can make hissing sounds, grunts and some giant land turtles can even bellow.

Female turtles, tortoises and terrapins all lay eggs. While most of these animals are small, some species, like the Galapagos turtle, grow to weigh more than 300 pounds. Some species, like the ordinary box turtle, even live for over a hundred years! ●

Dorsal View  
(back view)  
CARAPACE

Ventral View  
(belly side)  
PLASTRON

