

Leopard gecko husbandry and care

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Leopard geckos are small lizards frequently kept as pets. They are relatively hardy and easy to care, and can live up to 10-14 years with proper conditions. Wild leopard geckos live in Middle Eastern deserts and arid areas with plenty of rocks to hide and they are active mostly during the night. Besides the wild type color morph, there are several color mutations found in captivity.

Housing

Leopard geckos should be kept on their own as they are not very social animals. To keep a happy and healthy beardie you will be needing the following:

- **Medium to large glass horizontal vivarium** (minimum for an adult: 60 x 30 x 30 cm)
- **Ventilation** – the vivarium should have some screens to allow air movement.
- **UV-B bulb** – Despite being mostly nocturnal, geckos benefit on having a bulb with 2% UV-B output (280-315 nm), directed over the basking spot. These need to be directly over the animal (without any glass, plastic or mesh) and replaced every 12-18 months.
- **Heat mats** – should be placed on one side of the vivarium to keep temperature around 30-35 °C. The opposite side of the vivarium should be around 24 °C. Do not use a heat rock as they can be dangerous for reptiles! A slight night time temperature drop is ok.
- **Basking bulb** – might be necessary in some enclosures to keep temperature within ideal range.
- **Thermometer/hygrometer** - to check if temperature/humidity are within the ideal range.
- **Substrate** – safe options are paper towels or artificial lawn carpets. Sometimes, geckos are kept in sand or soil but there is some risk of ingestion and intestinal blockage.
- **Decoration** – branches or rocks for climbing and hiding places should be provided. One hiding place can be kept more humid to make sure geckos go through a normal shed.

Veterinary care

- Yearly health check
- Yearly fecal testing for internal parasites

Brumation – Leopard geckos don't hibernate but when conditions are not ideal in the wild they can go through this process of lethargy. It's something that shouldn't happen in captive animals and always indicate some illness.

Diet

Leopard geckos are strictly insectivores. Food items include:

- **Insects** – appropriate size crickets, locusts, cockroaches, mealworms or morio worms. Occasionally, wax worms can be given as treat. All prey insects should be gut-loaded and dusted with calcium before being offered to your beardie.
- **Calcium supplement** – offered with any meal.
- **Vitamins** – a multivitamin supplement can be offered once a week.
- **Water** – despite being a desert species, Leopard geckos should have a shallow water bowl always available and the vivarium misted daily.

Careful handling your leopard gecko!

Leopard geckos have thin and fragile skin that can easily bruised. They can also shed their tails if handled roughly or if wriggle too much! This is a normal anti-predator strategy called tail autotomy. The tail can regrow back but not with same shape/size



Signs of disease

Although quite hardy, leopard geckos can become ill sometimes. Reptiles are good at hiding signs of disease but any lizard that's refusing to eat, is more quiet, losing weight, passing abnormal stool or constipated should be examined.

Common disease problems include:

- Internal parasites
- Retained shed
- Retained eggs or follicles in females
- Skin growths and lumps