

Petware House

Your Neighborhood Pet Store

Geckos

Including Arid, Tibetan frog-eyed & leopard geckos



CARE SHEET

There are over 750 species of geckos found throughout the world. Most Geckos have specialized scales under their toes that help them climb up vertical surfaces and walk upside down. Arid geckos come in a variety of interesting colors and are great first-time lizards.

Average Size Hatchlings approximately 2" +/- . Adult size averages 6" - 9". Maximum size is around 12" - animals of this size are considered large.

Life span Up to 20 years with proper care.

Feeding Leopard geckos are carnivorous and thrive on a diet of crickets and mealworms. Consider your gecko's size when choosing prey items - young leopard geckos should be fed small crickets and mealworms, moving up to adult crickets/mealworms as your gecko matures. Start your young leopards on a feeding regimen of every other day, and offer them as many insects as they will eat in one sitting. Crickets can be introduced to roam throughout the gecko's enclosure, while mealworms may be offered in a shallow dish that allows the lizard to locate and capture them easily. Remove any uneaten food items within a few hours of feeding.

Housing Enclosures can be as simple or elaborate as one is capable of caring for. Remember that the more "stuff" you put in a cage, the more "stuff" you have to clean & disinfect on a regular basis. That said, there are many different enclosures that work well for leopard geckos, short-tailed pythons, including, but not limited to: plastic sweater boxes (i.e. Rubbermaid), melamine racks, Freedom Breeder cages, and any of the commercially available plastic-type reptile cages, (i.e. those from Vision Herp & other similar manufacturers). Glass aquariums & tanks also work very well for this species. Also refer to our Lizard Caging care sheet for more information. Remember that ALL enclosures must allow for a proper thermal gradient that the lizard can utilize, with a hot spot on one end and a cooler spot on the other.

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When choosing a cage for your leopard gecko, consider the number of animals you wish to house. A single leopard gecko can be kept in a 10 gallon aquarium. For multiple animals, larger enclosures should be used to allow the animals space to interact & also move away from each other. An enclosure measuring 36" x 18" x 16" will sufficiently house up to 10 adult leopard geckos. Harem groups, consisting of a single male and several females, often thrive & reproduce in this setup.

NOTE: NEVER house more than one male leopard gecko in the same enclosure! Males of this species are extremely territorial & will fight extensively, causing injury or even death to a rival male.

Maintenance Spot-clean your leopard gecko's enclosure as necessary. When feces/urates/uneaten prey items are present, remove them as soon as possible. Fortunately, leopard geckos make this task very easy by often choosing one corner of the enclosure in which to defecate - a "leopard gecko litter box" of sorts. Once your geckos have established their "toilet area" of the cage, you can make your job even easier by lining the spot with paper towel or newspaper. Simply remove the soiled paper when necessary & replace it with clean paper. Clean & disinfect the water bowl on a weekly basis. Depending on cage conditions, remove all substrate & cage furniture and completely disinfect using a 5% bleach solution approximately every 30 days. Rinse the enclosure thoroughly and allow to dry before replacing cage furniture & your gecko(s).

Temps Provide your gecko with a basking spot of 85-88°F and an ambient (background) temperature of 78-80 °F. The ambient temperature should not fall below 75°F. It is vitally important to KNOW the temperatures at which you are keeping your gecko(s). **DO NOT GUESS!!** A great way to monitor temps is to use a digital indoor/outdoor thermometer with a probe. Stick the thermometer to the inside of the cage on the cool end and place the probe on the warm end, and you'll have both sides covered at once. There are several ways to go about heating the enclosure: under cage heating pads, ceramic heat emitters and basking bulbs (red "night" bulbs) are just a few commonly available methods that work well for leopard geckos.

Humidity While leopard geckos typically thrive in a dry environment, providing a humidity chamber is necessary to assist your gecko in shedding properly. Humidity chambers are easy and inexpensive to make. This consists of packing a plastic container with damp sphagnum moss (think well-wrung-out wash cloth to gauge moisture), cutting a hole in the top or side & placing it in your gecko's enclosure so that it can access the box as it pleases. Peat moss or vermiculite may also be used in place of sphagnum moss, all of which are readily available at garden stores & outlets.

Remember to check the box at least a couple of times a week to gauge the moisture level. Spray the moss within the box as necessary to keep it damp. Leopard geckos will spend increasing amounts of time in the humidity chamber as they are ready to shed, as the moisture assists them in removing all old skin.

NOTE: Leopard geckos, like many other gecko species, eat their shed skin & leave very few remnants of the shed within the enclosure. Make sure that you check your gecko's toes and the end of its tail to ensure that all old skin was removed during the shed. Skin that is stuck to the toes or tail tip can eventually restrict blood supply to these areas, resulting in tissue death.

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Lighting Supplemental lighting is not necessary for this species, as leopard geckos are completely nocturnal. If you wish to use lighting to view your gecko's activity at night, we recommend the use of red night bulbs which emit heat & can double as a warm spot in your gecko's cage.

WATER & ACCESSORIES

Always make fresh, clean water available to your leopard gecko in a wide, shallow dish. Check your gecko's water frequently to make sure it is fresh and clean, and change it as necessary. It is often beneficial to have a spare water bowl for such occasions, so that one may be used while the other is being cleaned.

The one cage accessory that is essential to a happy leopard gecko is a good hide box...maybe even a couple of them. These are nocturnal, somewhat secretive lizards that appreciate & utilize a hide spot. Provide one on each end of your gecko's enclosure so that it doesn't have to choose between temperature & security. Clay flowerpots, plastic flowerpot trays, and commercially available hide boxes all work quite well. Leopard geckos will climb under and through many accessories placed in their enclosure. Cork bark slabs make attractive hiding spots & your geckos will probably use them if present. Leopard geckos are an excellent candidate for a "naturalistic" vivarium, as they do not have a reputation for "trashing" their enclosures as some heavier-bodied lizards may do.

BASIC REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION

Leopard geckos reach sexual maturity around 18 months of age under optimal conditions. Mature males are easily sexed by the presence of hemi penial bulges as well as femoral pores. The pores will be obvious in a V-shaped formation right above the vent. Females will also exhibit these pores, but they are much less pronounced. Animals should be well established and in excellent condition before any breeding is attempted. Breeding may be induced by reducing daytime photoperiod to 8 hours and dropping nighttime temperatures to 70 degrees for approximately 4-6 weeks. Do not feed the geckos at this time. After the cooling period, slowly raise temperatures to normal levels over the course of several days. Mature male leopard geckos will typically breed with any receptive, available females several times throughout the course of the year. Breeding groups of one male & several females may be kept in the same enclosure as long as space is available to accommodate them all.

Gravid females are easy to spot - eggs are visible through the skin on the female's belly, and typically two eggs will be present. Provide an egg-laying chamber similar to the humidity box, and place it on the warm side of the gecko's enclosure. Check both the egg box & the humidity chamber daily for the presence of eggs, and monitor the humidity within both boxes. Once eggs are laid, they can be checked for fertility by "candling" with a small flashlight. Fertile eggs will give off a pinkish glow & a network of blood vessels will be visible within the egg. Incubate leopard gecko eggs in slightly-moist vermiculite for approximately 60 - 70 days. As the gender leopard geckos is temperature-dependent, incubation temperatures in the low 80's should yield mostly female babies; at 88 - 90 degrees the resulting offspring will be mostly male.

Leopard geckos are considered very easy to breed and are an excellent starter project for the beginning herpetoculturist.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

Leopard geckos are a mainstay of the herp hobby. Their bright colors, docile nature and simple husbandry requirements make them an attractive candidate for the beginning & advanced herper alike. As these lizards are bred more and more in captivity, a variety of color and pattern morphs are available in a broad price range, making it very easy for anyone to acquire and enjoy these reptilian gems!

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