



# Paws, Claws & Wings

*Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals*



## Leopard Gecko Husbandry

As reptiles are rapidly growing in popularity as pets more Leopard Geckos have become available. These are beautiful sensitive lizards but do not make good pets for an inexperienced owner. They are very shy and flighty and get stressed very easily. They must not be handled excessively due to their skittish nature and do not make good 'cuddly' pets. These beautiful reptiles have specific housing and dietary requirements. If these requirements are not met, serious health problems may follow. Leopard Geckos can drop their tails (this means that the tail will fall off) if pursued so they need to be handled extremely delicately.



## Enclosure

For one adult gecko the cage must be at the least 60cm x 30cm. These lizards are social so many females may be kept together but do not keep more than one male in a terrarium as they are very territorial and may fight to the death. Due to their shy personalities, hides are very important. They must have access to at least one dry hide, and one moist hide (moist vermiculite / sphagnum moss). The moist hide allows them a space of high humidity which is needed to soften the skin before shedding. They do enjoy climbing and although they do not have adhesive toes they climb well on rough surfaces or raised areas. Rough areas (rocks / rough walls) in the cage are great for them to rub against to assist them to shed. Do not worry if you never see any shed skin in the cage as the geckos often eat their sheds. Good substrates to use in the terrarium are a bare floor, newspaper, towels, rabbit pellets or astro-turf. Do not keep the geckos on sand as it may be eaten, causing gravel impactions which may need to be surgically corrected.

As with all reptiles they should have a hot and a cool area in cage to create a thermal gradient. Their basking site (hot area) must be at 32 C and the cool area must be at 21 C. As they are nocturnal a UV bulb (producing UV B rays) is not essential provided the diet is correct, but it is preferred. The bulb needs to be replaced every 6 -12 months depending on the product as these lights only put out optimal UV for a period of time. An external heating and basking source must be used e.g.: under substrate heating pad



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and a ceramic basking lamp. Humidity can be provided by using a flat water bowl over a heating pad, they also sometimes enjoy a soak in their water bowls.

Leopard Geckos use defecatoriums (special chosen areas that they always defecate in) which make maintaining their hygiene quite easy.



## Feeding

Leopard Geckos are carnivorous which means they only eat animal protein. Crickets, Mealworms, Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches and mice are all good food options; remember to always feed prey that has been gut loaded. All prey items must themselves be fed correctly to ensure the gecko receives the correct nutrition from them. Never feed wild caught prey as the animal may contain pesticides. Offer a variety of different food occasionally so the lizards do not get bored and to ensure a balanced diet. Commercial Leopard Gecko pellets can be used but they must not be the only food available. For babies the pellets can be soaked in water so they are soft and more palatable. Tinned prey and dried prey (available commercially) can also be used. A small bowl of Calcium supplement (Calcium Gluconate) can be used or you must ensure that the prey is lightly dusted with calcium. Supplements do not need to be used if the diet is correct as over supplementation may cause medical problems. Live prey must not be left in the cage overnight as the prey might hurt the predator. These geckos can be fed once every two days or daily. Prey must be no longer than the width of the gecko's head. Never feed: fireflies, beetles, spiders, alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, as these items are toxic. These reptiles are nocturnal so feed them at night. Clean, fresh water must be available at all times. The water bowl must be no more than half the gecko's height when lizard is lying down. Babies may need a source of dripping water or to be soaked daily.



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## Common Health Problems

Metabolic Bone Disease can be caused by a calcium deficiency, improper vitamin or mineral supplementation, inadequate heat, an inappropriate diet or not enough UVB exposure. The geckos become lethargic, weak, painful, may have a rubbery jaw and swollen or distorted legs.

Parasite infestation may be caused by pinworms, coccidia, tapeworms and flagellates. The signs of internal parasites include weight loss, anorexia, undigested / watery / bloody faeces or dark irises. These same symptoms can also be caused by a bacterial infection.

Sr. Emmylou Rivers