

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR LEOPARD GECKO HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!

## Always

- take a newly purchased gecko to an exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness examination and fecal check for parasites
- quarantine new geckos in a separate area of the house for at least 30 days
- when housing geckos together in groups, include only one adult male to avoid fighting
- mist the hide box substrate daily.
- provide low level UVB light. As a nocturnal animal, leopard geckos may be adapted to low light intensity, and thus may require lower levels of supplemental UVB light in captivity than many other reptiles. However, studies have shown that they do best with regular UVB supplementation using a low level UVB light.

## Housing for your leopard gecko should:

- be easy to clean with good ventilation
- include clean fresh water provided in a shallow container that is large enough for soaking, which is changed/cleaned daily
- include a separate area for feeding healthy, well-fed prey coated in a powdered calcium carbonate supplement (free of any other vitamins or minerals) - all supplementation should be discussed with your veterinarian
- provide an appropriate gradient of temperatures in the enclosure, from 73-75°F on the cool end to 88-90°F on the warm end.
- provide acceptable substrates such as paper towel, newspaper, reptile carpet, or ceramic tile
- provide multiple hide boxes on both the warm and cool sides of the enclosure
- include a humid hide box filled with moist sphagnum moss, vermiculite, or sponge (which should be changed weekly)

## It is important for leopard geckos to avoid:

- sand, corncob or walnut shell as a substrate
- free roam of the house
- cats, dogs or other predators
- being picked up by the tail
- being housed together with more than one adult male
- hot rocks or direct contact with heating elements or light sources
- oversupplementation of vitamins
- insects from the yard, which may be contaminated by pesticides
- scented sprays

## Most Common Disorders of Leopard Geckos

- Intestinal parasites
- Metabolic bone disease
- Egg binding
- Gastroenteritis / diarrhea
- Sand impactions
- Shedding problems
- Loss of digits
- Tail loss
- Stomatitis
- Respiratory infections
- Eye inflammation/infection

Visiting your reptile veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your gecko. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting [www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

## Additional Reading:

*The Leopard Gecko Manual:  
From The Experts At Advanced Vivarium  
Systems*  
by Philippe De Vosjoli, Roger  
Klingenberg, Roger Tremper, Brian Viets

*The Herpetoculture of Leopard Geckos*  
by Philippe de Vosjoli, Ron Tremper,  
Roger Klingenberg

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Text and photos by Marc H. Kramer, DVM

Text updated by Alicia McLaughlin, DVM and Anneliese Strunk DVM,  
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## WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY LEOPARD GECKO



### Vital Statistics

**Body length:**  
7-10 inches (17-25 cm)  
**Body weight:**  
45-60 g  
**Age of sexual maturity:**  
10 months  
**Maximum life span:**  
10-25 years



**NOTE:** Most, if not all, reptiles carry *Salmonella* bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles, including leopard geckos. For more information, please see the handout, *Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners* at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.



### LEOPARD GECKOS

Leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) are gentle, hardy, long-lived lizards that have fascinated beginner and advanced reptile keepers alike. Originally native to the deserts and dry savannahs of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, leopard geckos are now well established in captivity following decades of large-scale commercial breeding.

Leopard geckos are nocturnal; as free-ranging animals in arid grasslands, they shelter themselves during the day beneath rocks and in burrows. Most adults are yellow with black spots; however, as a result of multigenerational captive breeding, several designer color and pattern varieties of leopard geckos are available.

### What to Expect from Your Leopard Gecko

Leopard geckos have a well-deserved reputation of making excellent pets. Their ease of maintenance, moderate size and attractive appearance have earned them high praise and popularity in the pet industry. Unlike many other geckos, leopard geckos possess movable eyelids, and they lack the sticky toe pads that enable many other geckos to cling to glass or walls. A leopard gecko should not be caught or lifted by the tail; the body should be fully supported when it is handled.

### Is Your Leopard Gecko a Male or Female?

As juveniles, there is little difference between male and female leopard geckos. Interestingly, leopard geckos undergo temperature-dependent sex determination, which means the sex of the gecko can be predicted based on the temperature at which the egg was incubated. As adults, males have a V-shaped row of enlarged preanal pores along their inner thighs, whereas females have only small pre-anal pits. Males also have paired hemipenal swellings at the base of the tail, which females lack. Males are slightly more heavy-bodied and robust with a broader head and thicker neck than females. Both males and females make equally good pets. Males should not be housed together, as they may fight.

### What and When to Feed Your Leopard Gecko

Leopard geckos feed primarily on live, moving insect prey. The diet may consist of commercially raised crickets, mealworms, superworms, waxworms, silkworms, roaches, and other live insects. Prey items should be fed a high quality diet ("gut-loaded") for at least 24 hours before feeding them to the gecko. Live prey should be offered in shallow plastic containers outside of the normal enclosure, which will reduce insect escape in the environment and prevent accidental ingestion of substrate by the gecko if loose substrate is used.

Appropriate-sized insect prey items should be offered every one to two days for juveniles, and two to three times a week for adults. As a general rule, feed insects with a body length no greater than the

length of the gecko's head and about half the width of the head. Feed no more than what the animal will consume within 15 minutes. Pinky mice should not be fed, as this predisposes leopard geckos to obesity.

Leopard geckos should receive supplementation with both calcium and multivitamin supplements. Prey items should be dusted with a calcium carbonate supplement with no added vitamins or minerals prior to being fed at least three times weekly. Twice monthly, a commercial reptile multivitamin supplement can be dusted on the insects prior to feeding instead of the calcium supplement.

Discuss diet and all supplementation with your veterinarian.

### Environment

A 10- to 20-gallon long aquarium is large enough to house one or two leopard geckos from hatching to adult size. A screen top to the enclosure should be used to provide good ventilation. Acceptable substrates include paper towel, newspaper, reptile carpet, or ceramic tile. Loose substrate materials such as sand or bark are not generally recommended, as this can increase the risk of impactions and are more difficult to keep clean. A temperature gradient of 73-90° F should be provided. Leopard geckos need multiple hide boxes on both the warm side and the cool side of their enclosures. A humid hide filled with moistened sponge, sphagnum moss or vermiculite is important to aid in the process of skin shedding. The contents of the humid hide should be changed regularly.

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