

Leopard Geckos

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The Leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularis*) originates from the semi-arid regions of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. In its natural environment, it can often be found hiding under rocks or in burrows during the day, but becomes active in the evenings and night times. It can be distinguished from other geckos by its distinctive spotted appearance, its lack of toe pads, and its eyelids (most other geckos lack true eyelids). Similar to other geckos, it can shed its tail as a defence mechanism (autotomy), so care should be taken when handling.

Scientific Classification

Leopard geckos belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Gekkonidae, Genus Eublepharis.

General care

A wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for geckos, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. The minimum recommended size for an adult gecko would be 60cm x 30cm x 30cm, but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep.

Geckos can be kept alone or preferably in groups of one male and several females, but owners should be aware that two males will often fight.

Inside the vivarium, several hiding places should be provided (at least one hide for each gecko) which may be half a log, a purpose built cave or even just an empty box with a hole cut in the side. One shelter should also be kept moist and humid to provide a suitable environment where a gecko can shed.

Hygiene

A vivarium should be "spot-cleaned" daily to remove any droppings, dead insects or uneaten greens. Once a week, the whole vivarium can be cleaned with a disinfectant suitable for reptiles (further details of suitable disinfectants can be obtained from your vet). It is important to always wash your hands thoroughly after handling reptiles as they can carry Salmonella.

Substrate

It is important to use a substrate that is easy to keep clean and replace, and is not going to cause a problem if accidentally eaten. Newspaper or kitchen towelling therefore makes the ideal substrate, but another alternative would be Calcsand. Ideally however, geckos should be fed in a separate container so that ingestion of substrate is minimised. Wood chips or shavings should never be used as they commonly cause intestinal blockage in lizards.

Temperature

Reptiles are not capable of regulating their own temperature so it is very important to keep their environment at an appropriate temperature at all times. A temperature gradient should therefore be provided, giving your reptile a hot end where they can bask and a cooler end to which they can retreat.

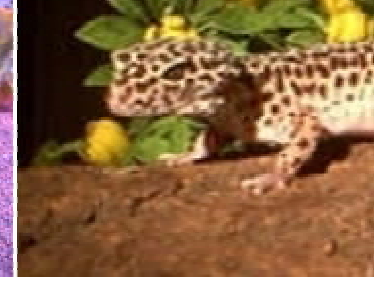
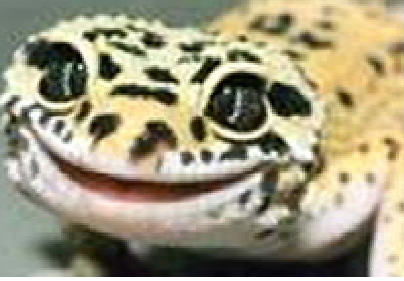
There are several types of heat sources available for vivariums including ceramic heaters (infra red light bulbs), tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Heat mats can be particularly useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium, whereas lightbulbs can be used to create a basking spot in the daytime, but should not be relied on as the only heat source.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always monitor it carefully with a thermometer and use some form of thermostat so that temperature can be accurately controlled. Heat sources should also be protected with a wire mesh guard or similar safety device if they are within a gecko's reach. The ideal temperature range at which to keep a gecko would be **25-29°C (77-84°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **32-35°C (89-95°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **21°C (69°F)** at night.



Barrier Animal Care Clinic LLP
Registered in England Partnership No. OC303416
Members: B Spolander BVSc MRCVS & S Rennie BA VetMB MRCVS
Tel: 020 8293 6580 Fax: 020 8858 5609 Email: wellpetclinic@btconnect.com
www.wellpetclinic.co.uk
VAT Reg: 691 3368 16





Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept low (20-30%) for geckos that are used to a desert environment. However, a high humidity hide area should be provided to help provide an appropriate environment for shedding. This can be a plastic box containing moist peat or cocoa fibre.

Lighting

Most lizards need to have access to both UVA and UVB rays, which many supposedly "full spectrum" reptile bulbs do not supply, so it is important to check this before purchasing a bulb. UVB rays are very important to allow a reptile to produce Vitamin D, which is essential for the absorption and use of calcium. Without this, lizards are at risk of developing Metabolic Bone Disease, which can often be fatal.

It is controversial whether leopard geckos actually require UV light or not, as naturally these reptiles are only active at evening and night times. Captivity however, can never simulate a totally natural environment and Metabolic Bone Disease is seen in leopard geckos, so it is a good idea to provide UV light for 10-14 hours daily, but using a bulb with a lower output (2% should be sufficient) than that used for diurnal lizards. Bulbs will need replacing every 6 months.

Diet

Leopard geckos are insectivores and in captivity should be offered a variety of insects, such as crickets, mealworms, and the occasional waxworm (although these should only be treats). Crickets and mealworms are readily available at most pet shops. These crickets and mealworms are however, generally not high in nutrients directly from the pet shop and will need to be fed well (GrubGrub, baby cereal, fresh fruit & veggies) before being offered to your gecko. This is called 'gutloading'. Live food should be 'gutloaded' for 24 hours before feeding. It is also important that the appropriate sized insects are fed to avoid problems with impaction. A general guideline is that the insect should never be bigger than the distance between your reptile's eyes. Juveniles need feeding every day, with adults only requiring feeding every other day.

In addition, feeds should be sprinkled 2-3 times / week with a powdered multivitamin/mineral supplement (further details can be obtained from your vet).

Lifespan

Leopard geckos generally live between about 15-20 years.

Signs of Health

A healthy gecko will be bright and alert with clear open eyes and nostrils and a clean vent. Skin should be undamaged with no sign of parasites, and shedding should occur regularly. Your gecko should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your gecko's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage. It is advisable to take your gecko to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.

Signs of Illness

Reptiles will often not show obvious signs of illness until they are very sick, but you should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, skin colouration or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth or problems with shedding.

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a reptile vet as soon as possible.

This caresheet is only intended as a general guideline, so please ask for further information.

Written and researched by Joanna Hedley BVM&S MRCVS



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