



Veiled Chameleons www.exoticpetvet.co.uk

The Veiled or Yemen chameleon (*Chamaeleo calyptrotus*) originates, as its name would suggest, from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In its natural environment, it spends the majority of its time in trees or bushes, and will feel most secure when perching at a height. This is one of the larger chameleons, and probably the easiest species to keep, although all chameleons are high-maintenance pets and not suitable for first time reptile keepers.

Males can be easily distinguished from females by their tarsal spur (a small spur on the rear of the hind feet).

Scientific Classification

Chameleons belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Chamaeleonidae, Genus Chamaeleo

General care

A wooden / chipboard vivarium with at least one or two netted sides provides the most appropriate setup for a chameleon, as adequate ventilation is very important for these lizards. The vivarium should ideally be as tall as possible to satisfy the climbing needs of the chameleon. The minimum recommended size for an adult chameleon would be 60cm length x 60cm width x 120cm height. It should be easy to clean, insulate and keep secure.

Inside the vivarium, a hiding place should be provided which may be half a log, a purpose built cave or even just an empty box with a hole cut in the side. Branches of different lengths and diameter should also be placed around the vivarium to allow chameleons to climb up and bask as they would in the wild.

Chameleons are generally pretty solitary, and can be aggressive if kept together, so adults should be kept alone.

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 therefore makes the ideal substrate, but another alternative, more suitable for humid conditions, would be cocoa fibre.

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. Incandescent spot lights will provide the ideal basking spot for your chameleons, but should not be used as the sole heating source whereas heat mats are more useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium.



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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 as chameleons will often choose to perch on them.

The ideal temperature range at which to keep a chameleon would be **25-30°C (77-86°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **36°C (97°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **21°C (70°F)** at night.

Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept moderately high (50-60%) for chameleons that are used to a humid environment. This can be achieved by misting the vivarium with warm water several times a day.

Lighting

Chameleons 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.

Various different types of UVB lights are available. It is important to check the percentage of UV supplied by the bulb. Lizards such as chameleons require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 12 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

Diet

Chameleons are omnivores and in captivity adults should be fed a diet composed of ~80% insects and 20% plants. Suggested insects and plants are listed on the attached diet sheet. Fresh food and water should be supplied once daily. It is important that the appropriate sized insects are fed, to avoid problems with constipation. A general guideline is that the insect should never be bigger than the distance between your reptile's eyes.

Fresh food and water should be supplied once daily, although it is important to supply water in a form that chameleons will drink. This usually means by providing a dripper system, or frequent misting of the enclosure, as these lizards are attracted to droplets of water that reflect light and will rarely drink from water bowls.

Lifespan

Veiled chameleons generally live between 4-7 years

Signs of Health

A healthy chameleon will be bright and alert with clear open eyes and nostrils and a clean vent. Skin should be undamaged and brightly coloured with no sign of parasites, and shedding should occur regularly. Your chameleon should also be keen to eat and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your chameleon'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 chameleon to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.



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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 (dark colouration can often indicate stress or illness) 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.

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