

Leopard Geckos as Pets

History and Biology: Leopard geckos are small, nocturnal lizards native to the deserts of Asia, Pakistan and northern India. During the day, these lizards sleep in burrows underground, which stay relatively humid as compared to the dry desert air. Leopard geckos have slightly lumpy, yet regular heavily patterned scales on the back which aid in camouflage.

Leopard geckos are generally friendly, and are easier to keep in captivity as compared to other lizards. Leopard geckos can live from 8 – 15 years in captivity, although ages as old as 20 years have been reported.

Housing:

- Leopard geckos can be housed in a 10 gallon aquarium designed for reptiles. Generally, these are longer and less tall than those made for fish. Lids should be used and should be closed down with aluminum foil or plexi glass to help trap heat and humidity. Up to 75 percent of the top can be closed off.
- Substrate in the enclosure should be artificial turf or reptile carpet. Coconut husk, corn cob and play sand are not appropriate, and may cause gastrointestinal obstruction if ingested. Reptile sand, even if it is dissolvable, should also be avoided as it can also cause gastrointestinal obstruction, cause mouth rot, an infection of the mouth, and can scratch the eyes.

Heating and Lighting:

- Day-time ambient temperatures inside the habitat should be kept between 77-85 degrees F as measured by an accurate thermometer, such as a dial or mercury thermometer. Temperature readings should be taken at several areas in the enclosure.
- Temperatures that are too low will cause decreased immune system function and metabolism, which leads to disease and failure to thrive.
- Heating for the habitat can be achieved through heat lamps or reptile heating pads placed under the terrarium. It is best to use heat lamps which emit no light, or emit a dim purple or red light. Ceramic heat lamps are readily available at most pet stores in the reptile section, or are available on-line.
- Even though Leopard Geckos are nocturnal, daytime lighting should be provided for 12-14 hours during the day. Ultraviolet light is not required.

Diet:

- Leopard geckos are carnivorous and should be fed small insects and other small prey. Small earthworms and silkworms are good choices as they are high in protein, have good Calcium to Phosphorus ratios, and are low in fat.

- Crickets can also be fed as prey items, but must be gut-loaded to enhance their calcium content. A gut loader such as T-Rex cricket food and gut loader can be fed to the crickets 24-48 hours before feeding to the gecko. It is important to remove any uneaten crickets promptly and feed them, as crickets may start feeding on the gecko.
- A small bowl of water should be provided at all times. It should be cleaned daily as bacteria may actively reproduce in the water bowls at the higher ambient temperatures in the terrarium. Though leopard geckos may not drink frequently, the bowl of water can help increase the humidity in the terrarium. The walls of the terrarium can be misted several times a day as some geckos prefer to drink water droplets. Large bowls of water should not be left in the terrarium, as geckos may urinate and defecate in the bowl and then develop skin infections or mouth rot from sitting in and drinking the contaminated water.