



Leopard Gecko Care Sheet

Leopard Geckos are one of the most fascinating, easy and docile reptiles to care for. For this reason they are often selected as beginner reptiles.

Leopard Geckos originate from the regions of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq and India. Their scientific name is *Eublepharis macularius*. One of the features of a leopard gecko is the fact that they have a true eyelid. Leopard geckos are nocturnal reptiles, meaning they are active at night. They can range in size from about 6-9 inches. They can live up to 20 years if they are cared for properly. Leopard geckos with their big eyes and "smiles" have captured the hearts of many.

Leopard Geckos require at minimum a 12"x12" space for one gecko. This often makes them an ideal pet for who have space considerations to take into account. Often people will house an adult leopard gecko either a 10 gallon or 20 gallon tank. ExoTerra makes some excellent enclosures for leopard geckos. They can also be housed in a reptile rack system in tubs with the same space requirements taken into consideration. Geckos can be housed individually or in small groups. Females can be housed together, but males should not be housed together as they will fight. If housing a small group (2-3) of females, it is important to monitor feeding behaviors of each gecko, defecation cycles and to ensure that there are adequate number of hides for each gecko throughout the enclosure. Unless you are 100% sure of the sex of your geckos, it is best to house them separately.

Leopard geckos require belly heat to properly digest their food. This can be accomplished by providing an under tank heater on one side of their enclosure. Under tank heaters should always be used with a thermostat to ensure proper heating is provided. Ideal temperatures should be 90-94 degrees on the warm side and 70-74 degrees on the cool side. This temperature gradient is essential so that the gecko can move around the tank and regulate their temperature accordingly. Hot Rocks/Heated Reptile Rocks should never be used with a leopard gecko as they can malfunction and burn your gecko.

Loose substrates are not recommended for leopard geckos. Any loose substrate like Sand, Calci-Sand, gravel, or other products sold for reptiles etc. can be accidentally ingested by your gecko and they can become impacted. Recommended substrates are paper towel, slate or reptile carpet. Losing a gecko due to impaction is something that can be avoided and we encourage you to make a safe and healthy choice for your reptile.

Hides should be placed on both sides of the enclosure, both the warm and cool side. Pet stores will often try to sell you hides that you can place next to the glass and view your gecko. This actually defeats the purpose of the hide and does not give your gecko the much needed security that it seeks of a quiet place to rest out of sight. A moist hide should be provided for your leopard gecko. The easiest way to provide a moist hide is to use a food storage container with a hole cut into the side or top of the lid. Moisture can be provided simply by placing a white paper towel in the hide and water added. Keep

in mind that geckos will often lick the condensation from the sides of the moist hide, so if you would not give your gecko water from your tap you may want to provide bottled water in the moist hide.

Leopard geckos will shed their skin, and eat it (yes, eat it). Adults may shed their skin once a month and juveniles may shed more often. It is important to provide a moist hide during these times to ensure that your gecko is able to fully shed their skin. If you find that there is any retained shed (on their tiny feet or anywhere else) it could be problematic. If left on their feet it could cause circulation problems and eventual loss of their toes. If you have a gecko with shed problems you can put them in a shallow warm soak to soften the retained shed and you can gently roll the area between your fingers to help remove it. If you are unable to remove the stuck shed you are better off seeking veterinary assistance than having your gecko lose parts of it's body.

Feeding time for geckos is one of the most delightful times a gecko own can have. Watching a leopard gecko eat is truly enjoyable. Some geckos will appear cat-like in stalking their prey--wiggle their tails and then pounce! Like most reptiles, geckos do best on a varied diet. Food items safe for geckos are: crickets, meal worms (should be dusted due to their high phosphorus content), dubia roaches, super worms, phoenix worms and silk worms. Treats you can give your gecko are small horn worms (they grow very fast), butter worms and wax worms. The rule of thumb when feeding your geckos is to feed it food items no bigger than 3/4 the size of their heads to avoid choking or impaction. It is important to gutload insects you feed your gecko to ensure they get the best nutrition possible. Crickets, meal worms, super worms and dubia should all be gutloaded with vegetables like collard greens, spaghetti squash (both very high in calcium), sweet potato, kale, pumpkin or other high calcium vegetables prior to feeding. Providing a small dish of clean water is important for gecko care as well.

Supplementation is extremely important for your gecko. Dusting your feeders with a super fine calcium with D3 (made for reptiles) every second or third feeding and a vitamin supplement once per week. Magalia Gecko Project provides Repashy Calcium Plus as a supplement, this product provides the correct ratios of supplements for geckos. It is recommended that you provide a small dish of calcium (without D3) for your geckos in their enclosure at all times. The importance of providing appropriate supplementation cannot be stressed enough. Without adequate supplementation your leopard gecko could have a compromised immune system or get metabolic bone disease, which is excruciatingly painful and avoidable.

It is not necessary to provide any extra lighting for your geckos. Exposing them to bright light can hurt their eyes and is not recommended, remember these are nocturnal animals and they do not need the heat lamps that most people often associate with reptiles.

Most, not all, leopard geckos will choose a spot to routinely defecate in. This can make things extremely easy for their owners if they choose a spot. If your gecko chooses a spot to use regularly, you can cut up squares of paper toweling to use as "leopard gecko poopie pads" and change them out. Normally 2-4 pads stacked on top of each other suits this purpose well and most often you will need to change 1-2 of the pads at a time to keep a clean enclosure. The normal defecation of a leopard gecko will contain two parts, a white part (the urates) and the brownish fecal matter. The color may change a bit depending on diet/shed cycle etc. It is important to keep an eye on what your leopard geckos poop looks like! The leopard geckos kidneys produce the urates (the equivalent of human urine). If you notice a drastic change in your geckos defecation, you can take a fresh sample to your veterinarian and get a fecal test done. Veterinarians require an exam if there are any findings (such as a parasite) before they will prescribe any medication to treat.

Once your gecko has arrived it may take up to a week to adjust to the new surroundings. Some geckos acclimate to their new homes more quickly but each gecko should be given a week to settle in prior to handling it. Young juvenile leopard geckos tend to be more skittish than older leopard geckos. Never pick up a gecko by its tail. A leopard gecko will drop its tail as a defense mechanism. The tail can grow back, but it will not look the same as the original. Leopard gecko tails are important to them as they store fat reserves and water in them. When handling your gecko you should let them see your hand and offer it to them, palm side up and if picking them up, gently scooping them up from underneath. Young or very skittish geckos can be picked up in a deli cup. Simply put the deli cup on its side next to the gecko and gently nudge them into the cup, paying close attention to the tail (be sure to cover it with your hand or lid as they may leap out). Being consistent, calm and patient with your gecko will hopefully earn trust and you will be able to handle your gecko. Always keep in mind that they can leap and injure themselves. Some geckos are never comfortable with being handled and others are very docile.

If you ever have a concern about the health of your leopard gecko you should take it to a veterinarian that specializes in the care of reptiles. Well cared for these amazing creatures can live for a long time! If you ever are unable to care for your leopard gecko, please do not release it into the wild. Adopting your gecko out to a suitable home or reptile rescue is a much better alternative and the right thing to do.