

Caring for your leopard gecko

How to keep pet leopard geckos healthy and happy



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Are leopard geckos right for me?

Leopard geckos are one of the easiest lizards to look after which makes them an ideal first pet. They have lots of character and are docile, friendly and easy to handle. Most will become tame with regular handling.

With proper care, leopard geckos can live up to 20 years so they require long term commitment. Males are larger than females and will grow up to 25cm long. These geckos are nocturnal, which means that they are active during the night.

As they're quite delicate creatures, leopard geckos can be ideal pets for older children and adults. It's really important that you never pick them up by their tail when handling.

Leopard geckos come from the hot, dry areas of northwest India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

They live on the ground and although they can climb, their ability to do this is quite limited.

Choosing a new pet leopard gecko

When selecting your leopard gecko, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Alert and interested in you
- Strong, sturdy tail
- Healthy skin with no blemishes
- Bright, clear eyes
- Good appetite, eating regularly
- Clear nose and vent

The first few days

We advise buying and setting up your vivarium for at least a week before bringing your new leopard gecko home. This gives you time to get used to setting the temperature just right, creating the ideal environment for him to settle in.

When you bring him home, carefully place your gecko in the vivarium. Leave him, with some water, for 48 hours to settle into his new home. He needs time to get used to his new surroundings and will require as little stress as possible.

We recommend that you keep handling to a minimum during the first week until he is more comfortable in his new home.

Creating a happy home

Leopard geckos need an escape-proof vivarium with good ventilation.

The minimum size of a vivarium for an adult should be 60cm x 30cm x 30cm for a single animal, but larger for a pair or a trio.

Heating and lighting

All reptiles are cold blooded and therefore rely on an external heat source to maintain their body temperature.

Leopard geckos need a range of temperatures in their vivarium. Heat should be at one end of the vivarium allowing your leopard gecko to warm up while the other end should stay cool.

You will need a thermometer at each end of the vivarium to monitor this range. The cooler end should be a temperature of 20°C

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and 32°C at the heated end. This should be controlled with a good quality thermostat that is designed to be used with a heat mat. The heat mat can be placed at the bottom or on the back of the vivarium.

Leopard geckos are nocturnal but do require low level UVB lighting. This can be provided by using fluorescent tubes which should be replaced every 6 months.

Your leopard gecko will suffer if there is too much humidity and poor ventilation so it is important that this is controlled and monitored precisely.

Decoration

The floor of their vivarium should be covered with a suitable layer of calci sand, cage carpet, desert substrate or artificial grass.

Leopard geckos need a humid area to rest so spray water lightly under the hides or use a special hiding cave like a Repti-Cave. Moss can also be used in the hidey holes to ensure humidity. These areas give your gecko some privacy and rest places whilst they are asleep when there is light. They also like to have an area suitable for hunting and feeding.

Cleaning

Water and food bowls should be washed, dried and refilled and any droppings or uneaten food removed every day.

The whole vivarium should be completely cleaned out and disinfected regularly with the bottom layer of the vivarium removed and replaced.

Kitchen sinks should not be used for bathing reptiles or cleaning reptile's dishes

or vivariums. If bathtubs are used for these activities, they should be cleaned thoroughly with disinfectant.

A healthy diet and treats

Leopard geckos are carnivorous and eat a variety of crickets, locusts and mealworms.

Feed them insects every other day and give them wax worms as a treat every now and then as these are high in fat.

Feed only as many insects as your gecko will eat in 15 minutes as excess, uneaten insects will annoy them.

Insects need to be dusted with a vitamin and mineral supplement to ensure there is enough calcium in your gecko's diet.

Shallow food and water bowls should be used for leopard geckos.

Getting to know you

Smaller geckos can be delicate, and children should always be supervised when handling them.

Your movements should be slow and gentle but confident. Your gecko can be picked up by cupping gently in both hands and supporting the whole body.

Geckos shed their tails if alarmed, so careful handling is essential. They should never be picked up by their tail.

Always wash your hands before and after handling your gecko.



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Leopard geckos and other pets

Male geckos can become territorial and are best kept alone. Females will live happily with other females.

Leopard gecko skin shedding

Baby leopard geckos may completely shed their skin once every month in the first year. Their skin will fall off in small pieces so they may look slightly shabby for a while.

To help them shed their skin they will need a humid, hidden area and a gentle misting with spray once a day.

Potential health issues with leopard geckos

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea can be caused by incorrect feeding or an internal parasite infestation. Seek veterinary advice if diarrhoea is present.

Overgrown nails

Nails sometimes may become overgrown and will need to be trimmed. Please ask our pet centre team for advice on nail trimming.

Finding a vet

If you have any worries about your leopard gecko, please consult your local vet as soon as possible. All vets have a basic understanding of reptiles, but a reptile specialist may be worth finding just in case.

Pet insurance for your leopard gecko

You can insure your leopard gecko under most exotic pet insurance plans. We always recommend taking pet insurance wherever possible.

Your new pet checklist

- Vivarium or tank
- Heat mat or lamp
- Thermostat
- Lamp protector (if lamp is used)
- Thermometers x 2
- UVB tube
- Small shallow food and water bowls
- Live foods
- Bug grub
- Bug gel
- Vitamin or calcium supplement
- Disinfectant
- Sand or grit
- Caves, hidey holes, plants



Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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