



# Basic Leopard Gecko Care

## **Natural History**

Leopard Geckos are ground-dwelling, nocturnal lizards found in the arid grassland and desert regions. During the day, leopard geckos mostly stay in burrows and shade, or under loose stones and bark. Despite leopard geckos being more active at low light, it has been shown that they do require diurnal basking temperatures for optimal growth.

## **Characteristics and Behavior**

Leopard geckos are popular pets due to their docile nature and moderate care requirements. They are able to 'drop' their tail if startled or grabbed. This does not hurt the gecko, but can be stressful, so gentle handling is recommended. With their smaller size and charismatic faces, leopard geckos are a popular choice for a first reptile.

## **Lifespan**

Leopard geckos live 6-10 years. Adult Size 7-10 inches with females typically smaller than males.

## **Housing**

It is a common misconception that reptiles will get stressed by too much space. Reptiles are not stressed by too much space, but by too much exposure. A leopard gecko housed in a spacious enclosure with plenty of cover to feel safe will utilize all of its space. Therefore, a 30-40gal (approximately 30"x16"x16") is the minimum size recommended for a leopard gecko. Adult geckos should be housed alone, as they can seriously injure each other. Cage accessories, such as plants (live or fake), branches, ground clutter, caves, and logs will all enrich a gecko's environment. Keep in mind that they are primarily a ground dwelling lizard when designing a gecko's environment, but they should still have an elevated basking area. Reptiles should have at least one hide on the warm end of their enclosure and one on the cool end of their enclosure so they don't have to choose between thermoregulation and security. For substrate paper towels, newspaper or tile should be used. Avoid CalciSand, VitaSand, crushed walnut, gravel, and corncob as these substrates carry a much higher risk of impaction if ingested. Also avoid wood shavings as these can cause respiratory issues in leopard geckos.

## **Lighting**

Like all lizards, leopard geckos require UVB light to synthesize vitamin D3 in their skin. Vitamin D3 is needed for proper metabolism of calcium and prevention of metabolic bone disease. Arcadia's T5 7% ShadeDweller and T5 6% Forest are both acceptable choices, depending on where you set up your gecko's basking spot. UVB is NOT optional for lizards. Lack of proper UVB can lead to impaired skeletal, muscle, and immune function. Replace UVB bulbs every 6 months, as they can continue to give off light even when not producing UVB. Lights should be turned off at night to maintain normal day/night cycles.

## Heat

Basking Temperature	95-100F
Daytime Temperature	80-85F
Nighttime Temperatures	65-70F

Ambient temperatures are best measured with digital thermometers (one on the warm end and one on the cool end). Leopard geckos need a basking spot of 95-100F, a warm ambient of 85-90F, and a cool ambient of 70-80F. Any light emitting sources should be turned off at night and temperatures can drop to the low-mid 60s. These heat producing bulbs can be found as reptile specific bulbs or at hardware stores. Avoid hot rocks as these can easily burn reptiles.

## Humidity

Humidity should be kept around 30-40% and a humidity hide should be provided to create a humid microclimate that the gecko can enter at will. A humidity hide can be as simple as a Tupperware container with a hole cut out filled with damp moss, a wet sponge, or damp Eco Earth substrate. Ambient humidity should be measured with a digital hygrometer. Shedding issues are extremely common in leopard geckos, so providing a humidity hide is important to help them shed normally. If you notice that your gecko has shed stuck around its toes, contact a veterinarian experienced with reptiles as this can cause constriction, necrosis of tissues, and eventual digit loss.

## Feeding

Leopard geckos are insectivores, meaning they eat only insects. Variety is key to avoid nutrient deficiencies! Leos can be offered crickets, dubia roaches, silkworms, phoenix worms, and the occasional mealworms, waxworms, and superworms.

	Juvenile (under 6months)	Adults
Insects	Daily	Every 2-3 days
Dusting	Calcium 2 x week Vit A and multivitamin 1x week	Calcium 2 x week Vit A and multivitamin every other week

Juveniles (under 6 months) should be fed 2-3 food items daily, and adults should be fed as many insects as they can eat in 10-15 minutes every 2-3 days. Food should be live, as dried feeders may not elicit a feeding response, and no larger than half the width of your gecko's head. Remove uneaten feeder insects after about an hour as they can bite your leopard gecko and cause trauma.

All insects should be gut loaded for 24 hours prior to feeding. See the Gut Loading handout.

Insects should also be dusted with calcium powder. Calcium powders should be calcium carbonate based and should not have any phosphorus. If you are providing adequate UVB, calcium powder does not need to contain D3.

## Water

Provide a dish that is large enough for the lizard to soak in. Leopard Geckos may defecate in their bowl so it should be changed and disinfected regularly.