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## Colorado Reptile Humane Society's Guide to Caring For Leopard Geckos

### General Information

Leopard geckos are native to Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. They are large geckos that can grow up to nine inches long. Most adults are yellow with brown spots. Unlike many geckos, they have eyelids but no adhesive lamellae on their feet so they cannot walk up vertical surfaces. They will tolerate occasional gentle handling but are not recommended as pets for young children.

Leopard geckos are nocturnal, sleeping during the day and becoming active at night. They are interesting to observe as they move around their habitat and stalk their food.

Females usually get along and can be housed together. Males should be housed with females only. Females can lay eggs without the presence of a male. In order to avoid adding to the number of homeless geckos, any eggs should be removed from the tank and destroyed to prevent hatching. We recommend placing eggs in the freezer as a sure way to stop embryo development.

### Habitat

A 30-gallon tank or a 20-gallon long (30 in. long by 12 in. wide by 12 in. high) is the minimum acceptable size for one gecko. CoRHS recommends a 40 to 55-gallon tank for two geckos.

Acceptable substrates are reptile carpet, newspaper, paper towels or old bath towels. Sand of any kind is not an acceptable substrate due to potential eye damage, skin damage, and risks associated with ingestion. Additionally, all particulate substrates (ground walnut shells, corn cobs, alfalfa) increase the potential for intestinal impactions requiring expensive veterinary procedures, including surgery.

Provide small limbs for climbing. Two hide boxes are needed; one in the warm end of the tank and one in the cool end. Place a tray of damp peat moss under the hide in the warm end to aid shedding. The rest of the cage should be dry with no added humidity.

Keep a shallow bowl of fresh water available at all times for drinking. Change the water and thoroughly wash the bowl daily.

### Temperature

Daytime temperatures should be 72-80°F (22-27°C) in the main part of the enclosure with the warm end at 90°F (32°C). Night time temperatures can be in the low 70s (22°C) if the warm end remains around 80°F (27°C). These temperatures can be maintained with the use of infrared mats, basking bulbs, or ceramic emitters.

Do not use hot rocks. They frequently malfunction, causing severe burns or death. Temperatures under light bulbs should be closely monitored. Bulbs greater than 100 watts should not be used due to excessive heat.

### Lighting

Being nocturnal, leopard geckos do not need special UV lighting. They do require darkness during the night, so a red or black nighttime bulb can be used to observe their activity. The red or black bulbs are perceived as darkness and do not disturb their day/night rhythm. The temperature must be carefully monitored as some of these bulbs produce heat.

## **Maintenance**

The enclosure should be spot checked for feces daily. Remove and replace soiled and wet portions of the substrate right away to prevent bacteria and fungus growth. Change the substrate and disinfect the enclosure with a 5% bleach solution on a regular basis. Avoid cleansers such as Lysol or Pine-Sol as they may leave a toxic residue. Rinse the enclosure thoroughly with clear water after cleaning with any detergent or bleach solution. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling the gecko and after cleaning the enclosure and accessories.

## **Diet**

Leopard geckos are insectivores. CoRHS encourages a varied diet of crickets, zoophoba (commonly called “superworms”), waxworms, mealworms, and ‘bait’ worms such as red wigglers and Canadian nightcrawlers. Feed young geckos every day and adults every other day.

To provide more nutritious prey items for your gecko, it is best to feed the prey (also called “gut-loading”) at least 24 hours before feeding to the gecko. More information on gut-loading can be found at [www.anapsid.org/feedingbugs.html](http://www.anapsid.org/feedingbugs.html).

Feed the gecko in the evening after it is awake and moving around. Leave a small container of prey food in the tank so that uneaten insects won’t feast on the sleeping gecko.

Provide a small dish of calcium powder in the habitat at all times to supplement calcium intake.

## **Shedding**

Leopard geckos shed their skin every few months. Unlike snakes, geckos may eat portions of their shed skin. Maintaining a moist area under the hide will aid in the shedding process.

Unshed shed is frequently retained on the toes. The retained shed can dry out and constrict the toes, causing them to die and fall off. To prevent this, soak the gecko’s feet and forelegs in warm water at the end of the shed cycle. Gently rub the toes to ensure a complete shed. Never forcibly remove unshed skin.

## **Veterinary Care**

Routine veterinary screening for newly-acquired leopard geckos is advised. With any sign of illness, we recommend a visit to your reptile veterinarian as soon as possible. Watch for cloudy eyes, swollen gums, nasal discharge, noisy breathing, and loss of appetite for extended periods.

To locate an experienced reptile veterinarian in your area, visit [www.herpetvetconnection.com](http://www.herpetvetconnection.com).

## **For Further Reading**

Melissa Kaplan’s Herp Care Collection  
<http://www.anapsid.org>

Western New York Herpetological Society  
<http://www.wnyherp.org>

*The General Care and Maintenance of Leopard Geckos and African Fat-Tailed Geckos*  
by Philippe de Vosjoli  
Published by Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1990.

*Keeping and Breeding Geckos*  
by Hermann Seufer  
Published by T.F.H. Publications, 1991.

*This guide was updated in April 2009.  
Please contact [info@corhs.org](mailto:info@corhs.org) for more information.*