

Jacksons Chameleons (*Chameleo jacksonii*)

Introduction to Jacksons Chameleons

Jackson's Chameleons (*Chameleo jacksonii*) are found in nature in eastern Africa, but most specimens available in the pet trade are from chameleon breeders in warmer climates and from a Hawaii, where healthy populations exist from pets that were released in the 1960s and 70s. Jackson's Chameleons grow to 5-8" long. The interesting Triceratops-like horns of these chameleons are prominent in males and are very small or non-existent in females. The crest is often yellowish or yellow-green. The body color light to medium green, but they can change color at will and according to their mood. Juvenile males will not display the elegant horns of the adult males, but may have small rostral horns at the tip of the nose. The females may never develop any further than those small nubs as they mature into adulthood. As a rule of thumb, Jackson's Chameleons are not a good first chameleon to own.

Housing Jacksons Chameleons

Jackson's Chameleons require quite a bit of space for their size. The minimum caging requirement for these lizards is a 18" x 18" x 24" (or taller). These are arboreal or tree-dwelling animals, and they need to have room to climb.

Cages can be made of screen or glass. Screen cages are commonly available in many pet stores, and may be the best option as these chameleons need plenty of air flow in their environment. There are two problems with screen cages, however. Maintaining high humidity, an important husbandry factor for these lizards, is essential, and substrate can also spill out through the screen. A plexi-glass panel can be attached around the bottom of a screen enclosure, keeping the moist substrate in the enclosure and also creating a bit more humidity.

Popular substrates for the Jackson's Chameleon are peat and sphagnum moss, coconut fiber, cypress mulch, and topsoil.

Whatever the substrate, it should be kept moist, but not soggy. If the bedding is too moist, and proper ventilation is not provided, the bedding will grow mold and these conditions are bad for your lizard's health.

As an arboreal chameleon, Jackson's Chameleons need branches and vines to climb on. Live or artificial plants may be used in the terrarium to allow the chameleon surfaces to climb on and places to hide.

As the lizard defecates, the feces should be cleaned out entirely. The substrate can be spot cleaned but should be changed out completely every two to three months, provided it hasn't gotten moldy. If there is any odor of mold or mildew to the substrate, change it out immediately.

These chameleons should be kept individually, and care should be taken to keep them out of sight of each other. Even the sight of a male can be distressing to a female and can cause her to stop eating. Introductions should only be made in the breeding season when the female is displaying signs of receptivity.

Heating and Lighting Jacksons Chameleons

A heat lamp may be provided for heat, especially if a keeper's house is kept cool. The ideal temperature for these lizards is at 75° to 78° F during the day and 65° to 70° F at night. They do need UV-B exposure, which can be provided through the addition of a fixture overhead. Keep in mind that UV rays do not travel through glass (and are restricted somewhat by screen mesh), so even keeping your chameleon in front of a window will not give them the necessary exposure. Even an open window will provide a challenge if the cage is made entirely of glass.

Watering Jacksons Chameleons

These chameleons rarely drink out of a water bowl, but one should be added to the enclosure as it helps to keep the cage humid. The cage itself should be sprayed at least once a day, and the chameleon itself can be sprayed as well. Water sprayed on the leaves may also be eagerly lapped up.

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Feeding Jacksons Chameleons

Jackson's Chameleons feed on crickets, superworms, and other invertebrates. Newborns (this species gives live birth), can be fed wingless fruit flies and "pinhead" crickets. Adult chameleons will also eat mealworms and waxworms. Feed Vita-Bug® feeder insects and CalciWorms® for the proper balance of nutrition. Prey items need to be dusted with a mixture of 1/3 calcium powder and 2/3 vitamin powder that contains Vitamin D3 if they are kept indoors and without Vitamin D3 if they are kept outside year round.

