

# Leopard Gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*)

## Introduction to Leopard Geckos

The Leopard Gecko is a wonderful pet lizard found in nature living in hot, dry, rocky grassland and desert areas. Most pet Leopard Geckos originated from shipments of animals from Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, northwestern India, and some parts of Iran in the 1970s and 1980s. In nature, they live in areas that can be extremely hot and that can be quite cool in winter. They are easy to maintain and have been bred in captivity in the United States since the 1970s. They are potentially the most common reptile pet in America today. These hardy geckos are available from pet stores, reptile shows, and from breeders in a variety of colors, patterns, and sizes.

Leopard Geckos are long-lived with most living 6 to 10 years but reports of well cared for specimens living for more than 20 years are common. Adult Leopard Geckos can reach a length of 7" to 8" and some adult males of the "giant" bloodlines can grow to 10 to 11".

## Housing Leopard Geckos

A 20-gallon long terrarium (12" w x 12" h x 20" l) can easily house one or two Leopard Geckos. This size enclosure lets them explore and exercise but keeps them in close proximity to their shelter which will reduce stress on them.

We suggest a substrate of 75% sand and 25% peat moss with the addition of live or fake plants, a clay cave, and pieces of bark, Cholla cactus skeletons, bones, or other creative additions to their "desert style" home. Be sure to spray under their cave shelter once a week to keep this area more humid than the rest of the enclosure. This will make sure that they shed properly. If kept too dry, Leopard Geckos have shedding issues that usually include skin sticking to their toes. This can lead to infections and loss of toes from constricted blood vessels in the area.

## Heating and Lighting Leopard Geckos

We suggest keeping your Leopard Geckos warm by adding a reptile heat mat or undertank heater below your terrarium. As they are nocturnal (active at night), Leopard Geckos don't need the intense light and UVB-emitting rays of a heat lamp. As with all reptiles, establish a hot end to the enclosure and a cooler end to their enclosure. Place a shelter at each end and let the gecko move from warm to cool to thermoregulate. We do not suggest using heat rocks for Leopard Geckos or any other reptile pet. They tend to become too hot and should be avoided due to the risk of burns. For viewing your Leopard Gecko at night, we suggest adding a low-wattage red bulb over the enclosure. This will let you watch the behaviors of your gecko at night as it prowls its home in search of prey.

The ideal temperature range in your enclosure is 70°-75° F at the cool end and 80° to 85° F at the warmer end. Leopard Geckos can cool down in the evening into the 60°s F and can heat up in the day to 90° F without any harmful effects.

Leopard Geckos (and most other gecko species) will establish one area of their enclosure as the "toilet". They will defecate in this area and it is easy for a keeper to simply spot clean this area and only clean the rest of the enclosure throughout the year as needed.

## Feeding Leopard Geckos

Leopard Geckos will feed aggressively on crickets, mealworms, superworms, hornworms, and waxworms. They do not eat plants or veggies. We feed Leopard Geckos appropriately sized Vita-Bug® crickets every other day, three or four crickets per feeding. We also add a shallow dish with Vita-Bug® mealworms, superworms or hornworms once or twice a week. A small number of waxworms can be offered as treats once or twice a week as well.

Since Leopard Geckos do not bask to receive vitamins through the sun's rays, your feeder insects must deliver appropriate vitamins and minerals critical to the health of the reptile. We strongly recommend Vita-Bug® insects to deliver the vitamins naturally, and Calciworms® for the calcium. Using Vita-Bugs® and Calciworms® provides your pet Leopard Gecko with a naturally complete diet requiring no dusting or gut-loading.

## Watering Leopard Geckos

A shallow water dish with fresh water should be available at all times. Make sure the terrarium's substrate remains dry, that no crickets can get in the water and drown, and make sure that young geckos can climb in and out easily.

We suggest that you do not handle your Leopard Gecko a great deal, especially one that is new to your home. We suggest 15 to 20 minutes a day maximum. Always sit on the floor when handling reptile pets so they don't jump or fall and injure themselves. Remember that as a defense many lizards will drop their tails when stressed or grabbed by the tail. This is the case with Leopard Geckos.



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