

Veiled Chameleons (*Chamaeleo calytratus*)

Introduction to Veiled Chameleons

Veiled Chameleons (*Chamaeleo calytratus*) are found in nature in Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the Middle East. They are found in a variety of habitats, including the mountain slopes along the coastline. Therefore, they do enjoy access to water and their humidity requirements are higher than what one would expect from a Middle Eastern species. This hardy species has been released into natural habitats in Florida and thrives there. It is commonly collected and these specimens make up much of those found in the pet trade in the United States today. Luckily, dedicated, reputable chameleon breeders are also producing healthy captive-bred Veiled Chameleons that do well in captivity when cared for properly.

These chameleons can grow quite large, with adult males reaching 18". Females are a bit smaller, reaching only about 12"-14" in total length. Hatchlings (this species lays eggs) start off life very small, in the 2" to 4" range.

Housing Veiled Chameleons

Veiled Chameleons do best when set up in enclosures individually. They do well in screen enclosures because of the increased airflow. A buildup of moisture and stagnant air in a glass enclosure can lead to respiratory infections in Veiled Chameleons. The ideal cage for an adult Veiled Chameleon is a screen enclosure measuring about 24" x 24" x 36" tall (or larger).

For baby or juvenile Veiled Chameleons, a small screen enclosure is best and then, as the lizard grows, you can move them to a larger cage. A smaller enclosure that is 12" x 12" x 18" tall helps them find prey items more easily and gives a keeper a smaller, more manageable home for his or her pet.

Place small branches, vines, and real and/or plastic foliage for the chameleons to climb on and to hide in. The thinner branches and vines provide important horizontal perches and let your chameleon access the warm hot spot and move out of the area when it gets too hot. Plastic plants with large leaves and non-toxic live plants such as Ficus, Pothos ivy, and others will provide some humidity and some stress relief inside the enclosure.

The enclosure's substrate can be a shallow layer of a mixture of 75% sand and 25% peat moss or coconut fiber with a top layer of cypress mulch. The substrate should be spot cleaned daily and changed out every couple of months or as needed.

Heating and Lighting Veiled Chameloens

Veiled Chameleons need a fairly hot basking area. The best ambient temperature for Veiled Chameleons during the day is between 75° and 80° F. By placing a heat bulb approximately 6" to 8" above a perch, a basking spot of approximately 90° to 95° F can be provided. This results in a hot basking area directly under the heat lamp and cooler temperatures lower down in the enclosure, so your chameleon can move toward the heat when necessary and can get away from the heat when it gets too hot. These lizards also need UVB rays that ensure proper calcium absorption. This UVB can be provided by natural sunlight outdoors, but for those kept indoors, keepers must provide a UVB-emitting lamp. Keep in mind that UVB rays are filtered out by glass (and somewhat by screen mesh), so place the full-spectrum light on top of the screen top of the enclosure, with the closest perches positioned approximately 6" to 8" beneath it. Chameleons not provided with a healthy diet, calcium with Vitamin D3, and UVB rays, will typically become sick and die.

Veiled Chameleons can tolerate cooling periods during the evening. Heat-emitting bulbs can be turned off for 8-10 hours at night and the temperatures can drop into the high 50s and low 60s F without any ill effects. Veiled Chameleons will seek out the heat once the heat lamps are turned on in the morning.

Watering Veiled Chameleons

Most chameleon species drink rainwater that settles onto leaves. It is important to spray your Veiled Chameleon enclosures once every day or two during the warm months and two or three times a week during cooler months to inspire them to drink. A drip system or misting system can be automated to spray your enclosure.

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Feeding Veiled Chameleons

Veiled Chameleons will feed on crickets, waxworms, superworms, mealworms, and an occasional pink mouse. Adults can be fed one or two feeder insects every day or 4-5 feeders every other day but baby and juvenile Veiled Chameleons should be fed once a day. Many keepers will make sure that a feeding dish always has a few treats such as waxworms and mealworms available. Be sure to feed Vita-bug crickets or coat crickets with a dusting of a mixture of 1/3 calcium and 2/3 vitamins every few feedings to ensure healthy growth, especially in young chameleons. The dusting of crickets with calcium and vitamin powder can occur fewer times for adults. It is always a good idea to gut-load feeder insects with shredded vegetables, fruit, and/or tropical fish flake food and commercial cricket diet.



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