

Leopard Gecko Care Guidelines

courtesy of Paul Sage Reptiles

Basics:

Leopard Geckos (*Eublepharis Macularius*) are native to Pakistan, Afghanistan and India where they live in an arid, mountainous environment. They reach a maximum size of approximate nine to ten inches with the males usually being the larger specimens. The captive population of Leopard Geckos in the United States is believed by many to be a mix of various subspecies which likely explains the wide variety of color mutations available to gecko enthusiasts. Leopard Geckos do not require the companionship of other Leopard Geckos to thrive, and should not be housed with other species of geckos or other reptiles. Male Leopard Geckos will usually fight if housed together, although a male may be kept with females provided that they are of comparable size.

Heating:

Leopard geckos are ectothermic animals that require a temperature gradient in their enclosure so that they can thermoregulate. This is vital to their digestive process, as improper temperatures may lead to eating and digestive problems. Leopard geckos should have access to a "hot spot" between 90 and 93 degrees Fahrenheit (32 - 33.5 Centigrade) in approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of their enclosure at all times. The rest of the enclosure should be near room temperature, or 74°F (~23°C). There is a variety of ways to achieve the warm area in the enclosure, with an under-tank heater being the most common and efficient. Not all under-tank heaters are capable of producing the appropriate temperature at the surface in the enclosure for a Leopard Gecko, thus attention should be paid to the maximum temperature listed on an under-tank heater. It may be necessary to use a thermostat or rheostat to control the actual heating element.

Humidity:

Leopard Geckos usually do well at standard household humidity levels, although providing them with a "humid hide" is a good idea to aid in the shedding process. A humid hide is simply a small container large enough for the gecko to fit in that contains a moistened substrate of coconut fiber, peat moss, sphagnum moss, paper toweling, or other appropriate media. Humid hides can be constructed out of plastic food containers with an access hole cut into the top. If shedding problems develop, it may be necessary to raise the humidity level in the enclosure, but adequate ventilation should be maintained to avoid the risk of respiratory ailments.

Lighting:

Leopard Geckos are nocturnal animals and therefore do not require the same lighting as some other reptiles. A simple viewing light may be used during the day above the enclosure provided that it does not interfere with the temperatures in the enclosure or the animal's day-night cycle. If heat is supplied to a Leopard Gecko via an incandescent lamp, a red or black "night time" bulb should be used so that it can be left on around the clock.

Substrate:

Many substrates can be used for the bottom of a Leopard Gecko's enclosure with good results. Options include paper toweling, newspaper, reptile carpet, slate, ceramic tile and sand. There is a great deal of controversy over the use of sand as a substrate for Leopard Geckos due to the risk of intestinal impaction that results from an animal ingesting the

sand. Although many adult Leopard Geckos have thrived on a sand substrate, it poses more of a risk to smaller leopard geckos. Sand and other loose particulate substrates can be more difficult to properly clean and sanitize, thus I usually recommend that Leopard Geckos be housed on an alternate substrate.

Diet & Hydration:

Leopard Geckos are primarily insectivorous, although adults may eat tiny mammals such as newborn “pinkie” mice. Staple diets for Leopard Geckos usually consist of mealworms, crickets, or superworms. Other insects include silkworms, wax worms and various species of roaches. To provide adequate nutrition, feeder insects should be fed an appropriate “gut load” prior to being fed to the gecko. Additionally, Leopard Geckos require vitamin and mineral supplementation which can be supplied via commercially available reptile-specific products. Calcium is a necessary mineral for Leopard Geckos, as a lack of it may lead to Metabolic Bone Disease. There is a wide variety of supplementation products available, and many of them are adequate for Leopard Geckos. Finally, a source of fresh, clean water should be available to Leopard Geckos. This can easily be accomplished by keeping a small dish of water in the enclosure at all times or by misting them daily to allow the gecko to lick water off the sides of its enclosure.

Hygiene & Quarantine:

As with any animals kept as pets, proper quarantine and sanitation procedures should be followed to protect the health of all animals in one’s possession. All newly acquired Leopard Geckos should be housed individually and away from existing animals in the home regardless of where they came from. Proper sanitation should be exercised to avoid cross-contamination when taking care of new animals, and all utensils and tools should be sterilized routinely. Keeping to a regular schedule of cleaning enclosures and equipment will help to ensure a healthy environment for both pets and people. Although pathogen transmission from reptiles to humans is far less common than portrayed in the media, it is a good idea to wash your hands after handling and caring for your pet. In addition to using an anti-bacterial soap when cleaning enclosures and equipment, pet-safe disinfectants such as chlorhexedrine can be used to ensure proper sterilization. If household bleach is used, please be sure to fully rinse the materials and allow them to dry before exposing them to reptiles.

Further Information:

There exists a number of books written on Leopard Geckos that provide detailed information on their husbandry, but keep in mind that not all authors will agree on the “best” method of providing and caring for Leopard Geckos. My advice is to explore the various opinions and weigh the options to see which works best for you. Additionally, there is a variety of internet message boards and forums where questions can be researched and asked if a suitable explanation is not found. I invite persons interested in purchasing a Leopard Gecko from me to ask any questions before and after making the purchase should they feel it would be helpful. In my opinion, a person interested in breeding their Leopard Geckos should achieve a good understanding of the general husbandry requirements prior to making plans for breeding their Leopard Geckos.