



## Leopard Gecko

Scientific Name: *Eublepharis macularius*

Written by Dr. Scott Medlin

**Background:** Leopard geckos hail from the desert region extending from Pakistan to western India. The popularity of leopard geckos has increased rapidly over the past three decades, and these ground-dwelling creatures are now relatively common in the exotic pet industry. Because of this, and because they breed fairly easily in captivity, most individuals that you find for sale in the U.S. are going to be hatched from breeders and not collected from the wild.

Leopard geckos top out at 6 to 10 inches in length from nose to the tip of the tail, and they commonly live from 8-12 years in captivity (with exceptional individuals occasionally living even longer). Males are usually differentiated from females by the presence of bulges at the base of the tail where the hemipenes are located. Males also have a row of prominent pre-anal pores that are located just in front of the vent.

**Enclosure:** The typical enclosure for a single adult leopard gecko is a 30-gallon glass aquarium. Other enclosures can work just as well, such as those made by Vision, ZooMed, Exoterra, or even a well-modified Rubbermaid or Sterilite container of a similar shape and size. Regardless of cage type, the enclosure needs to have a secure lid that will also allow for adequate ventilation.

The enclosure can include hiding areas to allow the animal a stress-free location to rest. Providing multiple hides located in different temperature zones within the enclosure is ideal. One of these hides can be a humid hide to aid in shedding. Humidity hides can be purchased commercially from your local pet store or made using a small Rubbermaid container that is large enough to comfortably house the gecko along with a moderate amount of sphagnum moss. Humidity hides can be constructed by flipping the container upside down, cutting an entrance hole into the side, and then finally by lining the enclosure with damp paper towel or damp sphagnum moss.

**Substrate:** The substrate for leopard geckos is best if it is a non-particulate substrate that is easily cleaned. This can be anything from commercially available liners (e.g. reptile carpet) to newspaper, or even paper towels. It is not recommended to use sand for leopard geckos as impactions can result, and this can be a life threatening condition.

**Light:** A simple viewing light can be used as a general light source. A simple 12 hour lighting cycle can be used.

**UVB:** Due to their nocturnal nature, leopard geckos do not require UVB supplementation.

**Heat:** The tank should have a temperature gradient. The warm side of the cage should reach 85 to 90 F during the day. A temperature drop at night is perfectly fine assuming that the room temperature doesn't drop below the low 70's overnight. Under tank heaters can be used, but these heaters should have some sort of temperature control device to prevent them from overheating.



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**Diet:** Leopard geckos are insectivores and as such can be fed a variety of crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and phoenix worms. We personally recommend feeding crickets over the other types of insects because the calcium and multi-vitamin supplements stick to them better. Additionally, crickets are generally leaner (i.e. less fatty) than the worms.

Because the crickets may not all be eaten in one sitting when added directly to the geckos enclosure, it is easier to gauge your pets appetite from day to day (and prevent injury to your reptile from the crickets) if you feed your gecko in a separate feeding tub. We recommend using a small Rubbermaid or Sterilite container with a tight fitting lid. After adding supplement to your crickets (or other insects) put them in the enclosure with your gecko and allow the reptile to eat freely for 10-15 minutes. Any remaining crickets can be placed back in your cricket keeper and your gecko can be returned to its regular enclosure. This method of feeding allows you to assess appetite, prevents injury to your gecko by the crickets, prevents the prey item from grooming away the supplement, and keeps the reptile enclosure clean.

**Supplements:** Leopard geckos require calcium supplementation *as well as* a quality multivitamin supplement. Feeder insects should be dusted with a calcium supplement prior to feeding two to three times weekly (adult). The insects should be dusted with a multivitamin once every other week (adult). Juveniles are fed more frequently than adults, and will need to be supplemented approximately twice as frequently as what the adults are for both calcium and multivitamin.

**Water:** It is recommended to keep a shallow dish of fresh water that is large enough for the gecko to climb into available at all times. The water should be changed out daily to keep it clean and fresh.