

Craven Animal Hospital 4603 Old Cherry Point Road New Bern, NC 28560 US Phone: (252) 637-4541 Fax: (252) 637-3658



This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.

General Information

Leopard geckos are native to the arid desert regions of central Asia and northern India. They have become a popular pet due to their docile nature and comparatively basic care requirements. Leopard geckos are nocturnal meaning they are most active at night. Leopard geckos can vocalize (unlike most other reptiles) and have other idiosyncrasies, such as licking their eyes to keep them moist and "winking." Leopard geckos will release their tails as a defense mechanism, so grabbing them by the tail should be avoided. The tail will grow back but will be smaller and usually duller in color than the original.

<u>Lifespan</u>

With adequate husbandry and diets the average leopard gecko can live around 15-20 years.

Sexing

Determining the gender of your leopard gecko can be difficult, if not impossible in juveniles. If you look at the underside of the tail just past the vent males should have two bulges side by side where the hemipenes (reproductive organs) sit in the base of the tail. Males also tend to have larger femoral pores (normally used for marking their scent on rocks). Male leopard geckos occasionally can get retained shed, normal secretions, and debris entrapped withing their hemipene pocket- this requires veterinary attention.

Housing

Leopard geckos require a 20 gallon tank at minimum, however, a 40 gallon tank is ideal for adults Make sure the enclosure has appropriate ventilation and is secure especially if you have other curious pets in the house (such as cats). Multiple hides are necessary for your gecko to sleep during the day as they would in the wild.

Substrate

The substrate should be easily cleaned and non-toxic to your leopard gecko. Newspapers, reptile carpet or tile are great options. Sand, bark, gravel and mulch should be avoided as they can cause gastrointestinal blockage if ingested.

Lighting and temperature

Reptiles need a warm place to bask (**85-90 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**75-80 degrees**) so they can thermoregulate. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage or an infrared laser thermometer may be used to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and total darkness is recommended at night- a ceramic heat lamp may be used to keep the enclosure warmer if needed but avoid nighttime infrared bulbs. Night temperatures should be greater than or equal to 60 degrees.

Leopard geckos do not require UVB light since they are more nocturnal, however recent research suggests that they may benefit from UVB light. UVB lighting is recommended to prevent metabolic bone disease, which is seen quite commonly in reptiles including leopard geckos.

Humidity

One or more hide boxes filled with wet paper towels or moss should be provided so your leopard gecko can shed its skin properly. Paper towels or moss within the hide will need to be sprayed down every few days as they will dry out. It may be necessary to help with your leopard gecko's shedding by providing daily soaks in warm water during this time.

Diet

Leopard geckos are strict insectivores- they do not eat fruits and vegetables. Feeder insects such as small dubia roaches and crickets are ideal and should be gut loaded prior to feeding to provide good nutrition (see below). Mealworms and waxworms should only be given occasionally as a treat because of their high fat content, and low digestibility. The rule of thumb is to offer 2-3 appropriately sized insects (small or medium crickets) for every inch of a leopard gecko's total length. So, a gecko 4 inches long should get about 8-12 small/medium crickets per feeding. Juveniles should be fed every day and adults (>12 months old) can be fed every other day.

Gutloading

Gutloading is the process of providing feeder insects with a vitamin and calcium rich diet prior to offering them to your reptile to ensure they contain the required nutrients to keep your reptile healthy. To create an appropriate gut loading diet, use one or two staple vegetables on the list below and feed it to the insects 6-24 hours before feeding those insects to your reptile. While convenient, some commercially available gut loading formulas (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition. Some preferred commercial gut loading diets are Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, and Super Chow.



Supplementation

Lightly dust all food items with a calcium carbonate or calcium gluconate supplement (without phosphorus or vitamin D3, as this can lead to toxicity) 3-4 times weekly until they are 2 years of age, then 1-2 times weekly after that. Offer a reptile multi-vitamin approximately once a month.

Water

A shallow water dish with fresh water must be available at all times. It should also be placed on a stable surface, so it cannot be spilled, and it should be easy to climb in and out of from all sides. Vitamin drops do not need to be added to the water.

Common medical conditions

Metabolic bone disease

- This is caused by a deficiency of calcium, ultraviolet light, and/or vitamin D3 that can lead to numerous problems including poor bone quality and pathologic fractures.
- Neonatal and juvenile reptiles, as well as reproductively active females have a higher demand for calcium and are more vulnerable to this condition.

Reproductive disease

- Egg binding/dystocia eggs become too large or misshapen and are unable to be delivered
- Coelomitis a ruptured egg releases yolk into the body cavity resulting in a severe bacterial infection
- Follicular stasis egg development stops, and inactive follicles take up space in the body cavity
- Females should be provided with a laying or nest box filled with loose substrate to mimic natural behaviors of laying eggs under the soil to avoid reproductive issues

Impaction

• Loose granular substrate can cause impactions when ingested which can lead to severe constipation and other complications

Gout and pseudogout

- Gout is caused by excessive amounts of uric acid in the blood either from overproduction or failure to get rid of it
- Excess uric acid gets deposited in either tissues (visceral gout) or into the joints (articular gout) and causes local inflammation and pain.
- Pseudogout is like regular gout but is caused by the deposition of calcium crystals instead of sodium urate crystals.

Retained shed (dysecdysis)

- If humidity or temperatures are inappropriate, this can lead to pieces of retained shed
- If left untreated, retained shed can restrict blood flow and cause loss of the tips of their toes

References

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