



Pet Hospital of Peñasquitos

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LEOPARD GECKO CARE

The leopard gecko, *Eublepharis macularius*, is a small fascinating lizard that in many ways represents an ideal starter lizard for the novice reptile keeper. Their cat-like qualities, soft velvety skin with leopard spots, docile temperament, hardiness, variable color patterns and prolific nature make them very popular. They are native to Western Asia from eastern Iran into Afghanistan, southern Turkistan, Pakistan and western India. Fortunately they breed readily so most are now captive born.

Leopard geckos do well in a ten to twenty gallon aquarium with smooth aquarium gravel in the bottom, rocks for cover and a water bowl. A nest box/hide box can be made from a shallow Rubbermaid container (any plastic container will do) with a hole cut in the lid or side and filled with one to two inches of moist (not wet or dry) vermiculite. Vermiculite is available from most plant stores, nurseries and some grocery stores in the plant section. The plastic container serves as a hidebox that boosts humidity in a small area to aid shedding in animals that otherwise need a dry environment and provides an ideal egg laying area for females. The geckos may eat the vermiculite but it passes through them harmlessly. As long as the vermiculite is kept moist geckos shouldn't have any problem shedding skin from their toes. One male can be housed with several females but not other males as males will fight with one another.

Cage temperature should be 70 to 90°F. If the room temperature is not between 70 to 90°F heating pads or heat tape underneath the cage or hot rocks inside the cage can boost temperatures. Use a thermometer to monitor temperatures so that you don't have to guess what the temperature is. Leopard geckos can tolerate brief periods of cooler temperatures (40 to 65°F) during the winter if they are in good health, this seems to be useful in breeding situations.

Feed your lizard two to three times per week. Leopard geckos eat insects of all types (grasshoppers, crickets, moths, flies, waxworms, mealworms) and baby mice (pinkies to fuzzies). Insects are deficient in calcium and therefore must be supplemented with calcium prior to feeding them to your reptile. One way to do this is to feed crickets high calcium diets for several days prior to feeding them to your gecko and then dusting

the insects with calcium lactate, gluconate, citrate or carbonate (see handout on **Feeding Insectivorous Reptiles and Amphibians**). To dust insects place powdered calcium in a plastic bag with the insects and shake them until the calcium finely coats the insects. Once or twice a month substitute a powdered multivitamin for the calcium. As adults many leopard geckos will eat baby mice which is recommended as an occasional substitute for their insectivorous fare. Overfeeding baby mice (more than two to three times per month) can lead to obesity.

Leopard geckos are seasonally polyestrous which means they lay several clutches per year during a distinct season. From late February to September females lay clutches of two eggs (rarely one) every three weeks for a total of 4 to 10 clutches. The longer day length seems to be the stimulus for breeding. Eggs can be incubated in a clean container with one part vermiculite to one part water by weight (see handout on **Incubation of Reptile Eggs**). Transfer the eggs to the incubator gently, keeping the same side up as when they were laid. At 80 to 85°F the eggs should hatch in roughly two months. Temperature dependent sex determination occurs in leopard geckos with predominately females produced between 82 to 84°F and predominantly males over 87°F. Eggs fail to hatch well below 80°F or above 90°F. Hatchlings begin feeding within 4 to 5 days on small crickets, waxworms and mealworms. They have a banded pattern at first which slowly transforms into the adult spotted pattern. If properly fed they should reach adult size and breed within their first year and can live twelve years or more.