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Chameleon Care

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Panther chameleons are one of the most colorful chameleon species available today. Native to Madagascar, they display a wide variety of colors depending on the area from which their line originated. Other popular chameleons include Veiled, and Jackson's, chameleons. While there are many species to choose from, these are the most common and easiest to care for.

Availability - Chameleons are commonly available from reputable breeders, local reptile shops, reptile shows, or through the internet. We recommend getting captive born, well established, older chameleons, rather than wild caught, as they do much better in captivity.

Size - Male panther chameleons typically have a body length of 12 to 18 inches, females are slightly smaller at 10 to 14 inches. Veiled chameleons get a little bigger, males averaging 17 to 24 inches, females averaging 10 to 16 inches. Jackson's chameleons are smaller. Males have 3 horns and average 8 to 10 inches, females do not have the horns and average 7 to 8 inches.

Life Span - Panther chameleons can have a varied life span depending on the level of care they are given. Under good conditions, your panther, and veiled chameleons should live 5 to 7 years. Jackson chameleons live about 5-10 years.

Caging - To make locating prey easier for your baby chameleon, house your new pet in a small enclosure. Screen cages 16 x 16 inches by 20 inches tall will work for the first six months of life. Screen is always preferred over glass, make sure that the screen has no sharp edges. After that, adult chameleons should be kept in a minimum of 18 x 18 inches by 36 inches tall enclosures. These sizes are the absolute minimum space requirements, larger spaces are recommended. House chameleons individually as they are solitary animals, and do not do well housed together. Males especially will fight, visual barriers are needed between cages to prevent them from seeing one another. Chameleons love to climb and live plants (such as *Ficus benjamina*, *Schefflera*, *Philodendron*, *Pathos*, or spider plants) will give them places to hide and feel secure. Coated wire vines, such as Exe-Terra Jungle Vines, and T-Rex Moss Bio Vines also work well in addition to a variety of climbing branches, such as sandblasted grapevine or manzanita. Plastic plants can be eaten, especially by veiled chameleons, not recommended.

Lighting and Temperature - Keeping chameleons warm is very important, especially during winter. Provide two types of light: one UVB bulb, and one incandescent heat bulb of appropriate wattage. The Zoo Med Powersun bulb is a great 2 in 1 product that delivers both

UVB and heat. Lights should be on a timer 12 hours on and 12 hours off with no light at night. Adult chameleons need a basking spot of around 90 to 95°F with the ambient temperature between 75 to 85°F; smaller chameleons should have a basking area of 85 to 90°F with a lower ambient temperature of around 75°F. Jackson chameleons can handle slightly lower temperatures. In general, don't let chameleons drop down into the 60's for very long. It is important for chameleons to thermoregulate, which is why you place lights toward the top of the cage. Chameleons will travel from the top down to the mid-level of the enclosure to regulate the amount of UVB they take in throughout the day. UVB bulbs should be changed every 6 months, as UV output declines precipitously after this.

Substrates - Chameleon cages are best left bare, without substrates. Substrates can complicate the cleaning of your chameleon's cage, give insects a place to hide, and can cause gastrointestinal blockage if eaten. If you choose to have substrate, keep it simple with paper towels or newspaper.

Feeding - A good diet is a varied diet! Crickets are the main staple, but meal worms, super worms, silkworms, hornworms, waxworms, Dubia roaches, stick bugs, can all, and should all, be offered to your chameleons. You can also collect flies, moths, cicadas, grasshoppers, honey bees with the stinger removed, and isopods (pillbugs or roly polly's) from outdoors for good free forage. Do not feed fire flies, as they are poisonous. Many chameleons will also take small soft shelled snails, slugs, and 1-2 day old baby mice.

Insect Care and Feeding - Insects should be fed a gut loading diet with 8% calcium and multivitamins for at least a day before being fed to your chameleon. Make sure the insects also have a water source such as wet paper towels or wet cotton ball in a bottle cap. Do not use the gel cubes or tasty foods or the insects won't eat the calcium rich diet. Before feeding the insects to your chameleon, dust them with powdered calcium carbonate. A wide variety of insects, gut loading, and dusting are all very important to ensure proper nutrition.

Water - Chameleons need access to dripping water every day. Misting the chameleon two to three times a day will keep the humidity in the required 70 to 80 percent range and will also allow the animal a chance to drink. We also suggest an automatic drip system running daily to several times per week. This will allow the chameleon to drink on a regular basis. It will also keep your plants watered and healthy.

Handling and Temperament - Panther chameleons are one of the more docile of the common chameleon types, though you can get an occasional grumpy one. It is important to remember that chameleons like to be left alone. They are great display animals that should not be handled on a daily basis. When handling a chameleon approach from the bottom. A hand coming from above can be taken as an attack. If you have a grumpy chameleon, first coax it onto a stick and then onto your hand or arm, do not pry the claws off screens, let them climb off on their own. With time, most chameleons come to associate their owner with food and will often come to the door in anticipation of feeding.

Egg Laying setup - For female chameleons in breeding situations, it is very important to have a nest box available. Female chameleons may produce follicles that develop into eggs that need to be laid even if unfertile. For a lay box we recommend a plastic box, as deep as the female's body length. Fill the nest box all the way to the top, with vermiculite and sphagnum moss, or peat moss and sand, either moistened, but not dripping wet. Make sure that this is the only area that your chameleon is able to dig, or she will excavate your plants. Protect your plants by placing 1 cm hardware cloth around their base.