



Husbandry Handbook

LEOPARD GECKOS

Eublepharus macularius

The Exception to the Rule

When defining what makes a gecko different from a lizard, there are a few things that come to mind right away. First, geckos have sticky toe pads that enable them to climb. Second, they don't have eye lids and have to lick their eyes to clean them. Lastly, they have vocal cords that allow them to bark and make noises. Leopard Geckos are unusual in that they don't have sticky toe pads and they have eyelids. They do, however, have vocal cords and can squeak and bark to ward off predators. While exceptions to the normal gecko rules, they make amazing first pet reptiles. They are docile, easy to handle and very hardy. With 30 years of selective breeding, they now come in a wide variety of colors and patterns.

Habitat

Leopard Geckos are native to the Middle East, inhabiting parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Iran. They live in rocky, dry grassland and sandy deserts. Most plant life in that region is drought resistant shrubs and grasses. These geckos are crepuscular meaning they are active at dusk and dawn due to high midday temperatures. Although the habitat is hot and arid, moisture is available in their burrows which helps them to shed and to keep humidity high for egg incubation.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Leopard Geckos can be housed in a 10 gallon Zilla® Critter Cage® product but adults require a minimum of a 20L Zilla® Critter Cage® product. While Leopard Geckos are very active, they are terrestrial and don't need a tall tank. Provide Leopard Geckos with a substrate that holds some humidity and isn't easily ingested such as Zilla® Bark Blend. Decorate the tank with a hide, driftwood, rocks and/or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. For moisture, provide a small bowl or dish of fresh water 2-3 times per week and mist once to twice weekly.



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Temperature and Lighting

It is important to create a thermal gradient (a warm and a cool side) in the cage/enclosure. This can be done with an appropriate sized Zilla® Heat Mat adhered to the bottom of the tank all the way to one side. Ideal temperatures for Leopard Geckos range from 75-80°F on the cool side and 80-85°F on the warm side. Provide a 90-95°F basking area on the warm side. While Leopard Geckos don't need UVB to survive, UVA/UVB light has been shown to greatly improve the immune system, health, and wellness of all reptiles, both diurnal and crepuscular. Using a Zilla® Mini Heat & UVB Fixture with a Zilla® 50W Mini Halogen bulb and a Zilla® Desert Mini Compact Fluorescent UVB Bulb will provide the correct heat and UV for your Leopard Gecko to thrive. Make sure to place the light over the side with the heat mat to help create that warm side of the thermal gradient. Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Every 3 months, remove all substrate in order to clean and disinfect the tank and décor.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, Leopard Geckos are primarily insectivorous, meaning they eat insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed Leopard Geckos crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches and waxworms. Feeder insects should be fed Zilla® Gut Load Cricket and Insect Food and given Zilla® Gut Load Cricket Drink. By feeding these products you will increase the nutritional value of your feeders and help pass important nutrients on to your Leopard Geckos. When feeding, spray the insects with Zilla® Calcium Supplement 1-2 times weekly for additional calcium. Supplementing calcium is necessary in order to prevent metabolic bone disease.

Handling

Leopard Geckos are generally tolerant of moderate levels of handling and interaction even as juveniles. Handle your gecko gently and deliberately, taking care not to drop or injure the animal. Do not grab your gecko by its tail which may cause the tail to detach if you are perceived as a predator or threat. Most adult Leopard Geckos will settle down considerably and become quite docile and easily handled.

Be sure to wash your hands after handling any animals.

Created in cooperation with the
Madison Area Herpetological Society, Inc.
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