

# Leopard Gecko Care

*Eublepharis macularius*



Leopard Geckos are the most commonly bred lizards in captivity. They are small, 20-25cm and make an ideal pet. In the past decade, they have been reproduced in huge quantities and due to this, a large number of pattern and colour mutations have evolved.

## Housing

For a single or pair of leopard geckos, a vivarium 60cm Length x 30cm Width x 30cm Height will be ample room. If you would like a trio (1 male and 2 females), then a 90cm vivarium would be required with additional hiding places. A vivarium can be made from a number of materials; wooden with melamine coating, glass, plastic and even good quality metal enclosures have been made.

I suggest a wooden vivarium, which is coated with melamine to allow the enclosure to last much longer. If you use regular chipboard or other non-coated woods, the vivarium will not last long with the water spillage and waste products related to keeping any animal. Be sure to have plenty of ventilation holes. Many vivariums are available on the market today already made to suit most reptiles, with ventilation holes and even fittings for the various heat and light appliances.

## Substrate & Décor

Leopard Geckos come from dry, arid areas which should be re-created in a captive environment. It is not essential to use natural sands and substrates; newspaper would do the job but it is not aesthetically pleasing. The point is though, that the substrate must be dry. That is not to say though that the gecko cannot get to moist areas, as they will often crawl into slightly moist burrows in the wild. A small moist hide box would be a benefit, especially for when

the time comes for the gecko to slough its skin.

A choice of substrate very much depends on what is more important for you. If you want something to look natural, then sand and soils can be the most aesthetically pleasing. These however are dirty and dusty and should be sieved through regularly to remove any waste. If sand is used, calcium based sand is recommended. This dissolves quicker than other sands and will even benefit your gecko with calcium additives when swallowed. Newspaper is cheap and easy to clean, but is not nice to look at. Wood chips can be used, but can often be swallowed by accident, causing an impaction in the gut of the gecko.

For a naturalistic environment, rocks, wood and plants can all be used. Although some live plants are safe to use, I suggest fake plants and cacti. Live plants will require more care and many give off toxic fumes. Be careful when placing heavier objects into the enclosure. Leopard geckos like to burrow, and will not hesitate to try and burrow underneath a rock. Make sure these objects are placed directly on the bottom of the enclosure and not on top of the sand, as this will collapse if the gecko decides to burrow under.

If you use any objects which have been outside, wash them thoroughly with hot water and weak disinfectant. It is important to be as clinical as possible and reduce any risk of bringing in infectious diseases or parasites.

## Heating

Like all reptiles, Leopard Geckos require a thermal gradient, meaning they must be allowed to move around the enclosure to find their required temperature. The hot end of the enclosure should be 86-90°F while the cool end should be approximately 74-78°F. During the night, the temperature should drop to a more constant overall temperature of 74-78°F.

In my opinion, the ideal way of heating a Leopard Gecko enclosure is to use a Ceramic Heater. The **WhitePython™ Ultra Slim Ceramic Heaters** are the ideal choice as it gives off ample heat but equally doesn't take up too much space in your terrarium. Ceramic heaters do not give off light and therefore in a terrarium you will need a form of lighting as well. To regulate the temperature accurately you should use a suitable thermostat. The **WhitePython™ Pro Control 2 Thermostat** will allow you to regulate the ceramic heater with a separate day time and night time temperature and also allow you to time your light to come on during the day.

Power Plates, spot bulbs and heat mats are also ways of heating a terrarium. These all have their advantages and disadvantages, but in my opinion, none quite weigh out to be as good as ceramic heaters.

## Lighting

Leopard Geckos are primarily nocturnal, meaning they venture out in the dark of night. This is when their main predators are sleeping, and their prey is awake. This is not to say though, that they never see the sun, or any form of lighting for that matter. They will often



bask in the sun during the day in the wild, so lighting should be offered.

Having artificial light in a terrarium is aesthetically pleasing to the owner, and is a good addition to a lizard's enclosure. They will use this as a photo-period, and their regular time clock will generally adjust to the settings on which you have your light set to.

They do not require any form of special lighting, such as a D3 Ultra-Violet light commonly used for diurnal species. The **WhitePython™ range of LED lights** are a great way to light your enclosure whilst using minimal electricity. They are also very slim and therefore do not obstruct your view into the terrarium. What's more, they are available in virtually any length you require. If you would like to go a step further and see your snake's activity during the night, you could use the **Moonlight Blue** or **Nighttime Red** versions of the LED lights.

## Feeding & Drinking

It is important that water is available at all times. Although leopard geckos come from dry, arid areas, they still like to drink. A shallow water dish which is hard to tip over and easy to clean is ideal. It is also an idea to have a bowl which does not have small crevices and cracks in it, which mould can build up in, and small insects can hide in.

Leopard geckos are primarily insectivorous, feeding on insects. However will sometimes feed on small pinky mice and perhaps even eat small amounts of tinned pet food. Mealworms, wax worms, earthworms, cockroaches, crickets and locusts are all suitable prey items. However certain foods should be limited. It is important that the food you give your gecko is as highly nutritious as possible. It would be nearly pointless to feed a starved cricket to your gecko. Therefore, placing food such as potato peel and cabbage into the insect's enclosure will benefit the gecko as much as the insects. Gut-Load can also be bought from many retailers. This is a balanced food for insects and should be offered to the insects at least 12 hours before feeding.

Hatchling or juvenile leopard geckos should be fed on a daily basis. They will eat up to around 10 small crickets or similar insects. These insects should be either crickets or locusts, and should be no larger than the width of the gecko's mouth. Wax worms can be offered in small quantities once a week, and mealworms can also be offered in small quantities twice a week. A Calcium:Phosphorous supplement should be dusted onto the food every other day. This is to aid in growing a healthy, strong bone structure, particularly in the leg and jaw areas.

Adults can be fed less regularly, 2 or 3 times a week. They should eat around 6-8 insects at a time, but obviously these should be larger insects, approximately the size of the leopard gecko head. It is important the food is not too small for the gecko not to be interested, and also important for it not to be too big for it to become hard to swallow. For females in breeding season, calcium supplements should be added to food on every feeding, to aid in the development of the eggs. For males and females out of breeding season, a dusting of supplements once a week will suffice.

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