

Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: Crested Geckos

Correlophus ciliatus is a wonderful species from New Caledonia. At only 6 – 8 inches in total length, they are a reasonable size for someone who would love an exotic pet but is limited in space. They are nocturnal, so don't expect to see this gecko too often during the day. At night time however, they are active little critters. Their husbandry is fairly easy for any level of experience and with regular outings they can be quite easy to handle. They are a longer commitment, having a life span of around 20 years in total.

Enclosure: Size, Substrate, and Accessories

As adults, crested geckos should be kept in a tall 20 gallon tank or an 18" by 18" by 24" Exo Terra. As babies, crested geckos should not be kept in something too big, as they can have trouble finding their food properly. A smaller size Exo Terra terrarium, a 2.5 – 10 gallon aquarium, or an appropriate size plastic critter keeper are all excellent options for raising babies.

The two most common choices for substrates are coco coir or paper towel. Generally babies are housed on paper towel as they are more at risk for accidentally ingesting their substrate and becoming impacted. Typically, impaction only occurs with animals that are dehydrated or in some other way unhealthy, and is much rarer than people think, but if you choose to keep your animal on loose substrate you should familiarize yourself with the signs of impaction and see what local vets deal with reptiles. Paper towel should be changed every week, and coco coir should be spot cleaned as needed and changed around every 6 months, depending on condition. In tanks with coco coir, it is also a good idea to consider adding a drainage layer to your setup so that the water can leave the substrate preventing it from getting too soggy. Crested geckos can also be housed on bioactive substrates, which will not need to be changed.

The most important things to have in crested gecko tanks is branches, vines, and plants. Crested geckos need to be able to hide and feel secure, as well as have places to properly sit so they do not stay on the glass upside down, leading to Floppy Tail Syndrome (FTS). The more foliage you can provide, the happier your gecko will be. Another excellent choice for accessories is cork – whether its rounds, flats, or branches your geckos will love it.

Lighting and Heat

In general, crested geckos should not need any additional heating in an average temperature room. This does not mean you should not invest in a thermometer – it is still very important to make sure the temp does not get too hot, as anything above 82 F (27.7 C) can be very uncomfortable, and potentially deadly for the gecko. If it is impossible to keep your home below this temperature, especially during the summer, then this is not the pet for you. The ideal range for crested geckos is from 70 – 80 F (21.1 – 26.6 C), with the top of the tank (the basking area) being around 75 – 79 F (23.8 – 26.1 C). At night, the geckos can comfortably sit at around 68 F (20 C). If your house gets much colder than this, you may want to invest in some night time heating, such as a ceramic heat emitter or a night time bulb to bump up the temperature.

Using UVB is something that is debated by a lot of keepers. Since most crested geckos would be hiding under leaves or inside log hollows during the day, they are not usually affected by the light. In fact, since they are nocturnal, crested geckos will go out of their way to hide from the light. This does not mean that there are no benefits to it, as it does create a more natural environment for the gecko. A low level of UVB is sufficient, such as a 2.0 or 5.0. If your setup has live plants, having some sort of daylight lighting is a must.

Diet and Supplements

There are many commercially made diets available for crested geckos. The most common and well respected brands are Repashy and Pangea, which both come in different flavours to mix in match depending on your gecko's personal tastes. These diets should be offered fresh every two days, depending on the consistency of the food. If starts to dry out the day after being put in, the food should either be replaced or should have a little water added to it and remixed. Bugs can be fed to the gecko once or twice a week. Crickets make a great choice for feeders. It is recommended to avoid mealworms and super (king) worms as their shell is harder than other feeders and the lower temperature makes it harder for cresties to digest them. Butter worms, wax worms and hornworms can be fed as occasional treat. Feeders should be dusted in calcium without D3 and be gut loaded 1 – 24 hours before being fed to your gecko.

Hydration and Humidity

Crested geckos should have humidity levels of 50 – 60%, with spikes up to 80-90% percent when misted. The dry out period is important. If it stays to wet it could lead to skin infections and trouble shedding. You should mist your geckos a minimum of two times a day, sometimes three times a day if necessary. This allows your gecko the opportunity to drink water off the leaves. The heaviest misting should be at night, as that is when the gecko will be active, and shedding. If your schedule does not allow you to mist this frequently, you may want to consider investing in an automatic misting system. Additionally, if you're having trouble keeping the humidity up, you may want to add a small dish of water. Some geckos may drink out of this, but more often than not they will just use the water droplets on the leaves. The water should be replaced every second day, and bleached once a week to prevent the growth of bacteria.

Cohabitation

As with any animal, males should never be housed together as they will fight, sometimes to the death. Females can be housed together, provided the enclosure is larger (Exo Terra Medium Tall, which is 24" high, 18" wide, and 24" long is a good start), there is more than one food dish, and there is multiple hiding spots and hangout spots for the females to get away from each other. Males and females should not be housed together unless you plan on breeding quality animals. Many keepers will let the geckos breed and freeze the eggs so they do not have to deal with the responsibility – this is not an acceptable solution if you knowingly let your animals breed with no intent of raising the babies. Each time the female lays eggs, she is depleting her fat and calcium stores needlessly, and if she is not replenished properly she is at risk for things like metabolic bone disease, and in extreme cases death. If she does not have a suitable place to lay, she may hold onto the eggs until they are too big for her to lay, resulting in egg binding. When this happens, the gecko needs immediate surgery. Animals of different sizes should also not be housed together. Additionally, if one gets sick, the other is pretty much guaranteed to get sick as well, costing you double the vet bills, double the meds, and causing double the stress.

Sexing

Crested geckos can be difficult to sex until they are between 15-20 grams. Once they are in that range, you can begin to look for pores on the males. This will require either a jeweller's loupe or a high quality camera that you can use to photograph the gecko's vent and zoom in. Sometimes, females will show a set of "fake pores" that are usually just dented-looking scales. As they grow though, it will become more obvious who has real

pores and who does not. When they mature, males will develop a set of hemipenal bulge at the base of their tail, females will remain relatively flat.

Checklist of Supplies

- ✓ Appropriate size enclosure for your gecko's size (this may or may not require a screen top)
- ✓ Substrate (paper towel, or plantation soil for adult geckos)
- ✓ Feeding dish
- ✓ Water dish
- ✓ Fake plants
- ✓ Branches or cork (flats, rounds)
- ✓ Thermometer
- ✓ Hygrometer
- ✓ Spray bottle or misting system
- ✓ Day time light
 - UV, Natural light, reptile vision
- ✓ Heat lamp with low wattage bulb
 - Only required if your house temperature does not reach the required temperatures
- ✓ Crested Gecko Diet
 - Pangea or Repashy
- ✓ Calcium without D3
- ✓ Insect Gut load