

Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: Leopard Geckos

Eublepharis macularis is an adorable species of gecko from the deserts of Asia, Pakistan, and Northern India. They aren't very large, with the average size being 8 – 10 inches, but have a fairly decent life span for a small critter, with many living into their 20s with proper care. They are docile, have small space requirements, easy maintenance, and come in a wide variety colours. They are easy enough for children to learn to take care of with parental guidance. This species is crepuscular, meaning they like to be out during the evening.

Enclosure: Size, Substrate, and Accessories

A 10 gallon tank is the minimum for one leopard gecko, but a 15 gallon (24" long by 13" by 13") or a 20 gallon long (30" long by 12" by 12") is more ideal for creating a proper gradient and for arranging the gecko's accessories so it isn't overly cluttered.

Baby geckos should be housed on carpet, but once they are full grown adults you can consider moving them onto something else. Excavator Clay, by Zoo Med is a great choice for creating a natural look, while still preventing the risks of impaction. Plus it allows you to get really creative with your setup and make it multidimensional. A bioactive substrate can also be used.

Leopard geckos have few needs as far as accessories. Two caves are the minimum, and they are usually placed on opposite ends of the enclosure to allow the gecko to thermoregulate and hide at the same time. One of these should be a humid hide (more information in Hydration and Humidity). Other accessory requirements are a water dish, and a calcium dish. The calcium dish should be filled with calcium without D3. Leopard geckos are one of the few animals that will lick at this as they need in order to maintain their calcium levels so it's important to ensure that this is cage at all times.

Lighting and Heat

Leopard geckos should have a hot spot that is maintained between 85 – 90 F. This can be achieved several ways. The most widely accepted way is by using a heat pad, as leopard geckos come out in the evening, and bask on the rocks that have been warmed by the sun. Heating pads should always be hooked up to a thermostat, or at the very least a rheostat, so that the temperature can be controlled and you don't burn your gecko. Glass tanks should also be raised slightly, so that the heat does not build up and crack the bottom of the tank. Heating lamps can also be used. Ceramic heat emitters (CHE), daylight basking bulbs, or infrared bulbs can all be used as long as they are an acceptable wattage. The cold side of the tank should always be maintained above 73 F. We personally try and maintain them around 80 degrees. Generally, no additional heating is needed to achieve this. Leopard geckos can happily hang out in the 70s – 80 F range at night time. You should avoid having bright lighting of any kind on albino leopard geckos as they are much more sensitive to it. For albinos, ceramic heat emitters and heat pads are the acceptable ways of heating them.

Diet and Supplements

Leopard geckos are an insectivore, and can be fed a wide variety of appropriately sized prey. They can be fed crickets, mealworms, phoenix, and smaller size supers as a staple diet, and butter worms, wax worms, and small hornworms as treats. Babies should be fed daily, while adults can be fed every second day. Typically, leopard geckos will eat anywhere from 10 – 20 prey items in a feeding, depending on their appetite. Some hobbyists will leave a dish of worms (typically mealworms or small super worms) in the tank so they leopard geckos can eat as they please, and offer crickets on a 2 – 3 times weekly basis for variety. Treats can be offered on a once a week basis. All prey should be gut-loaded 1 – 24 hours prior to feeding. Since a calcium

dish (with no vitamin D3) should be in the tank at all times, not a lot of additional supplementation is required. A multivitamin should be dusted on the feeders twice a week, and a calcium with D3 can be used once a week.

Hydration and Humidity

Fresh water should be offered in a dish at all times. The dish should be cleaned out every 2 days, as standing water can easily grow bacteria. Bleaching the dish once a week is also a great way to keep it fresh. In the wild, leopard geckos spend most of the day hiding underground in areas that are more humid. To replicate this, a humid hide should be provided so that the gecko has a place to shed properly. Ideally, this is a two part hide, with either a lid or a removable bottom. The hide should be filled with either paper towel, coco coir, or moss, and should be sprayed on a daily basis. Failure to maintain this hide can cause skin to build up on the gecko, typically on the toes, and restrict the blood flow, causing them to fall off.

Cohabitation

Males should not be housed together as they will fight to dominate each other, often to the death if left unattended. Females have sometimes been maintained together in a large enough tank that is extremely well furnished, but it is not recommended. While they may not always fight with each other, they usually compete for food and heating, which can stress the less dominant gecko out. Males and females will not only compete with each other, they can also become aggressive towards each other and will breed, which is not something that the average keeper is ready to do. Many keepers will let the geckos breed and freeze the eggs so they do not have to deal with the responsibility of sometimes 20 or more babies – 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 lay box, 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. Geckos that are of different sizes and animals of a different species 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

Leopard geckos are fairly easy to sex, once you know what you're looking for. Males have a set up V-shaped pores right before their tail, as well as a bulge right below their vent. Females will have little to no bulge, and very faint pores, if they are visible at all.

Checklist of Supplies

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| ✓ Minimum of a 10 gallon tank (with lid if necessary) | ✓ Calcium dish |
| ✓ Substrate (reptile carpet/excavator clay) | ✓ Water dish |
| ✓ Heat source (Heat pad + thermostat/heat lamp with appropriate wattage bulb) | ✓ Calcium without D3 |
| ✓ Thermometer | ✓ Multivitamin |
| ✓ Humid hide | ✓ Bug keeper |
| ✓ Hot hide | ✓ Bug gut load |
| | ✓ Bug diet |