



## CARING FOR YOUR LIZARD

### ABOUT LIZARDS

Lizards are popular pets. They require little space and are easy to maintain. The natural habitat of lizards ranges from tropical rain forests and jungles to parched and arid areas of the world. Many factors influence your lizard's health and well-being such as light, heat, humidity, stress, nutrition, and hydration. It is important to understand where and how lizards live naturally in the wild. Check with your pet retailer for your lizard's specific environmental requirements, and for recommendations on additional resources about the species.

Lizard pets can live for several years with proper care. Green Anoles and Long-tailed Lizards' average lifespan is 5 years, while Leopard Geckos may live 14-16 years in captivity. Most lizards do well in small groups that have only one male. Some species should be housed alone (Bearded Dragon, Veiled Chameleon, Panther Chameleon).

### HABITAT

The best habitat for most lizards is an aquarium or reptile terrarium. Larger enclosures are better, and the tank should be at least twice as long as your lizard. Reptiles are faster and stronger than you may realize, making them escape artists. You must have a secure screen cover with hinges, a latch, or a locking device that secures all sides. Placing weights on top of a screen cover is not sufficient. Because of their potential size, some lizards require special housing. There are enclosures designed for larger species such as Green Iguanas, Monitors, and larger Chameleons.

The base of the aquarium or terrarium should be covered with substrate appropriate for the species. Common substrates include:

**Sand:** ground-dwelling desert lizards

**Coarse bark and/or peat moss based potting soil:** woodland lizards

**Sphagnum moss over bark chips (should be incapable of being digested):** Arboreal lizards

Avoid cedar wood and shavings and potentially toxic materials such as stained wood, metal, or paint. A lizard's nails, tails, and teeth can get caught on wire or other materials with small crevices.

You may add materials for hiding, basking, temperature regulation, and climbing. Cork bark, logs, grapevine branches, driftwood, decorative rocks, and artificial plants are options, but check on suitability for your species. Material that can be removed or cleaned easily will help in regular sanitizing or changing the substrate.

### WATER

While both desert and tropical lizards require fresh water every day, the way it is provided depends on the species. Options include (1) a heavy, shallow water dish; (2) misting the environment, allowing droplets to be lapped up from leaves and branches; or (3) a special reptile drip system. Check with your retailer about the water requirements for your specific lizard.

## DIET

**Insectivorous** lizards prefer live crickets, dubia roaches, hornworms, mealworms, superworms and waxworms. For juvenile lizards and smaller species (e.g., anoles), provide crickets that are no wider than your pet's head.

**Herbivores** should be provided a mixed salad of calcium-rich greens, vegetables and fruits, such as dandelion, romaine, watercress, green beans, bok choy, shredded carrot, papaya, cactus fruit and berries.

**Omnivorous** species need a combination of the above. Larger lizards can be offered pre-killed feeder mice, feeder goldfish, chopped beef heart, or raw egg.

Dust insects with a calcium and vitamin D3 powder 2-3 times a week to provide these essential nutrients. Juveniles of some lizard species should get dusted insects more often, 4-5 times weekly. Juveniles should also get a weekly multivitamin supplement, while adult lizards typically require this supplement twice a month.

## TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY

Lizards need a temperature gradient throughout the enclosure, including areas where your lizard can bask. An incandescent reptile bulb is sufficient for most species. Get a timer to establish day/night light cycles, or turn the lights off at night. Lizards need warmth 24 hours a day. Electric basking rocks and under-aquarium heat pads are warming options but use a thermometer to ensure the temperature is within your species' desired range.

Lizards from arid areas (such as Bearded Dragons or Leopard Geckos) require daytime temperature between 85-100°F and lower humidity (10-30%). If room temperature is kept below 70°F, it may be necessary to use an under-tank heater to maintain proper temperatures. Woodland lizards require moderate warmth (75-90°F) and humidity (60-80%). Rainforest lizards require a warm and humid environment between 75-90°F and a daytime basking area.

Enclosures should have an ultra-violet light (UV-B), which most diurnal lizards need for vitamin D synthesis.

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## KEEPING YOU AND YOUR LIZARD HEALTHY

Good hygiene, care and handling will help prevent illness in your pets and reduce the chance of your lizard transmitting disease to humans. Along with providing the proper diet, temperature, and humidity, follow these steps to maintain your pet's health:

- ✓ Spot clean the enclosure daily and remove droppings. Weekly maintenance should include thoroughly cleaning the branches and rocks, turning the substrate, removing any large clumps, and wiping down the glass.
- ✓ Lizards should be handled with care and adult supervision. Sudden movements may startle a lizard causing it to run for cover, resulting in serious injury including the loss of their tail. Wash your hands with an anti-bacterial soap after handling your lizard.
- ✓ All bowls, dishes, and bottles should be cleaned daily and disinfected weekly.

Reptiles may carry bacteria, such as *Salmonella*, that can cause disease in humans. The CDC [Healthy Pets, Healthy People](#) website has information on steps you can take to stay healthy around your lizard.