



## **Warren Woods Veterinary Hospital**

29157 Schoenherr Road

Warren MI 48088

Telephone: 586-751-3350 Fax: 586-751-3447

[www.wwwhcares.com](http://www.wwwhcares.com)

## **Crested Gecko: Care and Husbandry**

Crested geckos are reptiles that are native to New Caledonia. They are arboreal, meaning they live in trees and therefore prefer lots of vertical space. Crested geckos are nocturnal and are most active during the night. These geckos come in a wide variety of colors and markings. They get their name from a fringed crest that runs from above their eyes down their necks and backs. Crested geckos have special toe pads and prehensile tails that allow them to effortlessly move along vertical surfaces. They are also very good jumpers. They measure seven to nine inches in length when mature. With proper care your crested gecko can live fifteen to twenty years.



The ideal habitat for a single gecko is a mesh cage or aquarium with a screened lid, minimally 12 inches by 12 inches by 18 inches. Male crested geckos are territorial and may fight, therefore they should not be housed together. A male and female gecko or pair of females may be housed together if they have an enclosure of at least twenty gallons. Acceptable substrate for the bottom of your enclosure can include paper towels, newspaper, butcher paper, terrarium liners, rabbit alfalfa food pellets or recycled paper products. Calcium sand is not a good choice because it can be ingested which may cause intestinal impaction. Wood shavings, walnut shells and sand are all inappropriate choices as these can be harmful if ingested, can carry parasites and irritating dusts and oils.

A crested gecko will need a variety of plants, branches and decorations in the enclosure to enable it to hide during the day. These can be purchased at your local pet supply store. Ask your reptile veterinarian for a list of live plants that are safe for your gecko. The enclosure should be cleaned regularly usually once weekly will suffice; with water and a mild soap.

The ideal humidity for a crested gecko is 50-60% this should be measured with a hydrometer placed in the enclosure. This level of humidity can be obtained with the aid of frequent misting of the enclosure combined with a commercial fogging or misting system if needed.

The ideal temperature for a crested gecko ranges between 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit, with one side being slightly cooler (about 5 degrees) than the other. This difference in temperature allows your gecko to cool off and avoid overheating. These temperatures are monitored with two thermometers, one on each side of the cage. If needed a ceramic heat emitter or reptile incandescent heat bulb can be used to increase the temperature of your gecko enclosure. Your gecko should have 12 hours of daylight (white light) and 12 hours of darkness for its natural biorhythms. A timer purchased from a pet supply store or hardware store can be utilized to maintain this twelve hour light cycle. At night, the temperature in the enclosure should drop slightly, about 10 degrees, as it would in their natural habitat. Night temperatures should also be closely monitored and ceramic heat emitters, red, blue or purple reptile night bulbs can aid in increasing night temperatures if needed. Always use reptile specific heat bulbs which have modifications that benefit the reptile and helps stimulates eating.

An ultraviolet light is beneficial for the health of crested geckos. This reptile specific bulb produces UVA and UVB rays and is purchased from your local pet supply store. The UVB rays are important for the natural production of vitamin D which helps the gecko absorb calcium from its diet. Without the UV bulb your gecko cannot properly absorb calcium which leads to metabolic bone disease. UV bulbs for reptiles come in two different forms the compact (coil) bulb and the linear florescent tube. While there are many companies that produce UV bulbs, Zoo Med and Zilla are recommended. Follow manufacturer recommendations to determine the type of UV bulb you purchase, and the distance to place the bulb from your crested gecko. All UV bulbs need to be changed every 6-12 months based on manufacturer's recommendations. After that time, even if the bulb still turns on it is not producing the vital rays your gecko needs for calcium metabolism. Plastic and glass windows are designed to block UVB rays so keeping the tank by a window will not provide essential UVB rays. It is ideal to provide monitored time outside on a warm day in an escape proof enclosure with access to shelter. Natural sunlight is the best source of essential UV rays.

The crested gecko occasionally sheds its skin. Frequency of skin shedding varies depending on the age and growth rate of the gecko. The gecko's color gets dull before it begins to shed. The shed skin may not be noticed in the habitat because it is normal for a gecko to eat it. This is an instinctive behavior that wild geckos perform so predators can't find their hiding place. It is important to check a gecko after it has finished shedding to make sure all of the skin has been removed. Any remaining dead skin can be removed by soaking the lizard in a warm water bath.

Crested geckos are omnivorous, it is important to offer a variety of food to ensure optimum health. Crested geckos should be fed a commercial crested gecko diet. Repashy diet is a nutritionally balanced powder that can be mixed with water and offered in a shallow dish. Insects may include crickets, mealworms, hornworms and wax worms in moderation as these can be fattening. Crickets and other bugs should be "gut loaded" in which the insects are fed nutritious foods before being given to the lizard. Insect gut loading food is available at pet supply stores. Insects should not be larger than one-half to three-quarters the size of the space between a gecko's eyes. Offer only the number of insects that can be eaten at one time. Live insects left in the enclosure may chew on a reptile and can cause injury. Fresh fruits should also be offered, these

may include bananas, strawberries, peaches, nectarines, apricots, papaya, mangoes, pears, and passion fruit. Fruit based baby foods are high in artificial sugar and should only be offered in moderation. The best time to feed the gecko is at night when it is most active.

Crested geckos do not produce enough calcium themselves and therefore it must be supplemented in their food. This can be done by purchasing a calcium D3 powder from your local area pet store. This powder is sprinkled on food 3-4 times a week for juvenile geckos (under one year old) or breeding females and 2-3 times a week for adult geckos. The calcium can be applied to live food by placing the insects and powder in a bag together and shaking lightly.

A shallow dish with clean water should be available at all times. Crested geckos might not recognize this as a water source at first so it is very important to mist the enclosure daily to keep them hydrated.

An annual examination with a reptile veterinarian is important to ensure a gecko is in good health. Crested geckos are very good at hiding illness; this is a survival mechanism that many wild animals share. It is important to see a veterinarian at the first sign of illness. Common conditions for crested geckos include intestinal impaction, metabolic bone disease, parasites, respiratory infections and egg binding. Following proper husbandry guidelines may decrease the incidents of some ailments.