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# Leopard Gecko Care

Please note these care sheets are intended for the average reptile owner to ensure that your pet is receiving basic care needed to have a healthy life and there are other aspects of advanced care that can be considered for healthy pets.

**Brief Description**

Native to the arid desert regions of central Asia and northern India, the leopard gecko *(Eublepharis macularis)* is a popular pet due to its docile nature and fairly basic care requirements compared to other reptiles. Leopard geckos are most active at dawn and dusk and typically remain in hiding for most of the day. Adults can reach up to 8-11" in length. There are several color morphs available like blizzard, snow, lavender, sunglow, tangerine, etc. Leopard geckos will voluntarily lose their tails as a defense mechanism so they should not be grabbed by the tail. The tail will grow back but it usually has a smoother texture and duller colors.



**Lifespan**

With proper care expected lifespan is 15-20 years on average.

**Sexing**

Determining the gender of your leopard gecko can be difficult, especially as juveniles. Once your gecko reaches maturity if you look at the underside of the tail just past the vent males should have two bulges side by side where the hemipenes (reproductive organs) sit in the base of the tail. Females will not have this. There is a small V-shaped row of circular scales between the back legs that will be small in females and larger or have a waxy substance in them in males.

**Caging**

Leopard geckos require a 20 gallon tank at minimum but 40 gallons is better for adults. Be sure to have a secure top on your gecko cage that will support a light fixture, provide good ventilation and keep out bothersome cats. Several dark hides that the gecko can fit completely into are necessary so they can sleep as needed during the day.

**Lighting and Temperature**

Reptiles are ectotherms (cold-blooded), meaning they need to absorb heat from their environment to regulate their own body heat since they cannot produce it. They need a warm place to bask (**85-90 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**75-80 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage to accurately measure temperatures. Your gecko will utilize different temperature zones throughout the day depending on its metabolism and needs. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 60 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary.

Leopard geckos do not require UVB light since they are more nocturnal, however recent research suggests that they may benefit from UVB light. UVB lighting is recommended to prevent metabolic bone disease, which is seen quite commonly. T5 UVB bulbs provide better zones of UVB than compact fluorescents.

**Humidity**

A hide box filled with wet paper towels or moist moss is necessary at all times so your leopard gecko can shed its skin properly. A Tupperware container with a hole cut in it works well as a hide but there are commercially available fake rock caves or hide boxes available as well. Paper towels or moss within the hide will need to be wet down every few days as they will dry out. Failure to provide an appropriately humid hide will cause problems shedding, which causes permanent loss of toes and tails.



**Substrate**
Newspaper, artificial turf like reptile carpet, flat stones or no floor covering are preferred. Sand, bark, or mulch should be avoided in most cases, especially if you are new to leopard gecko care. While these substrates can provide opportunities for digging, burrowing, and other natural behaviors they should be avoided by inexperienced keepers due to the problems they can cause like excessive ingestion, impaction, and obstruction.

**Food**
Live insects are a must for your gecko; they do not eat plants or veggies. The best items to use are crickets, dubia roaches, and superworms as they can be gutloaded to provide good nutrition. Mealworms and waxworms should only be given as a treat because of the high fat content. All insects must be first given a nutritious diet for at least 4 hours before being fed to your leopard gecko. This process is called “gut loading” (see below), and it is very important to the health of your pet reptile.

The rule of thumb is to offer 2-3 appropriately sized insects (small or medium crickets) for every inch of a leopard gecko’s total length. So a gecko 4 inches long should get about 8-12 small/medium crickets per feeding. Juveniles should be fed every day and adults (>12 months old) can be fed every other day.

**Gutloading**
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and/or dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

| **Staple Insect Gutloading Ingredients** (Highest in calcium and other nutrients) | | | | | |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Collard Greens | Turnip Greens | Mustard Greens | Escarole | Endive | Dandelion |

| **Good Insect Gutloading Ingredients** (Use as supplements to staples listed above) | | | | | |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sweet Potato | Papaya | Kale | Butternut Squash | Berries | Mango |
| Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow | | | | | |

| Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens) |
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| Idaho potatoes, cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, canned or dried insects, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards). While convenient, some commercially available gutloads (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition. |

**Supplementation**
A powdered calcium supplement (without phosphorus) should be used to lightly coat the crickets 3-4 times weekly until 2 years of age and then 1-2 times weekly after that. A powdered calcium supplement like Repashy Calcium Plus should be used to lightly coat the crickets 3-4 times weekly until 2 years of age and then 1-2 times weekly after that.

**Water**
A shallow water dish with fresh water must be available at all times. It should also be stable, so it cannot be spilled. Cage substrate should be kept dry, so be careful about spillage. Make sure that young and adult leopard geckos can climb easily out of the dish you use. Vitamin drops should not be added to the water.