



## Leopard Gecko Husbandry Sheet

Leopard Geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) originate from the Middle East in countries such as Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Adults can be at a length of 8-12 inches and weigh anywhere from 60 to over 100 grams in captivity. Leopard Geckos are terrestrial (land dwelling) and crepuscular – this means they are most active at dawn and dusk. They are among the easiest Geckos to keep in captivity, and when properly cared for can live for up to 20 years.

### Housing

Housing is easy with leopard geckos. An adult can be comfortably housed in a 20-gallon long aquarium. Leopard geckos are mainly a solitary species, and although some females can be housed together, it is not recommended for beginners. An aquarium's clear glass allows for the perfect observation of their natural behaviors. It is important that they are not cramped in their aquarium as this can lead to health issues.

The best substrates to use are paper, newspaper, paper towel, slate or tile. It is also important not to use sand, aquarium gravel, walnut shells or calcium sand as these can be fatal if they are caught in the gecko's digestive tract. Pine and cedar shavings are toxic to reptiles and should not be used.

To provide a sense of security for your gecko there should be plenty of hiding places available. It is advised to have hiding places in both the warm and cool sides of the tank. It is also important to provide a humid/moist hiding area in addition to a standard dry one. A covered mason jar or a throw away plastic container works very well if you cut a hole into the lid and fill it with a moist paper towel or moss. This provides enough humidity to allow the gecko to shed properly.

The warm side of the tank should be 88-90 degrees Fahrenheit, and the cool side should be in the mid 70's. Having a warm side and a cool side provides a temperature gradient for the animal that will help it to control its body temperature and aid in digestion. To obtain the proper temperature on the warm side of the tank, you can use an under-tank heating option. This can be done using heat tape or an under-tank heat mat that runs under the cage. Another way to obtain proper temperature is to provide a heat lamp that does not provide any visible light – such as a ceramic heat emitter or deep heat projector. Whatever heat source you choose, the level of heat should be able to be adjusted and monitored closely. This can be achieved by using a thermostat or dimmer switch allowing you to adjust the temperature. We recommend both a heat source and UV lighting to allow for proper calcium absorption. Because leopard geckos are not out often during the daytime, there is debate about their need

for UVB/full spectrum lighting. If used, it is recommended to be on for only a few hours each day to give your gecko the option to absorb the UV light if desired. If you decide to include UV lighting it is best to use a low level of UV. For example, the brand Arcadia has a “shade dweller” bulb that puts out 7% UVB as opposed to larger amounts in other bulbs. If using UV, be sure to replace the UV light as needed. For most brands, every 6 months is recommended to ensure proper UV strength.

Humidity levels are very important for geckos. Using a hygrometer, you can measure the humidity levels of the tank. It should always be between 30%-40%. You can achieve this by misting the tank and keeping the paper towel or moss in the hide boxes damp. It is important to note that if the overall humidity in the tank is lower than required, extra care will be required to ensure the humid hide stays damp.

### **Handling**

When attempting to hold your gecko it is best to take it slow. Waiting a few weeks or a few months may be necessary depending on the individual gecko. This gives them ample time to adjust to their new environment. Once they have adjusted, let them walk across your hand while still in the cage. Once it is more familiar with you, you can begin trying to hold it in your hands. Handling it too fast or too rough can stress the animal. If startled/overly stressed or if the gecko’s tail is grabbed; it can detach the tail from itself. This may lead to infection if not cared for properly. Most leopard geckos can regrow this tail, though it will never look normal again.

### **Feeding**

Leopard geckos are insectivores which means they only eat insects. The most common insects given in captivity are crickets, superworms, mealworms, silkworms and small cockroaches. Waxworms can be given as a treat but should be given sparingly because they can be addictive to geckos and are highly fattening. It is important to only give as much food as your gecko will consume in any given feeding. Left over prey running around in the cage can stress out and even harm your gecko.

In general, adults should be fed every other day and babies should be fed every day. In general, the prey item should be no longer than half the width of the gecko’s head to prevent choking. Feed as many insects as your gecko wants but be sure to monitor how much they are eating on a regular basis. It may be helpful to get a small kitchen scale to monitor weight throughout your pet’s lifetime. It is also important to note that every pet is different, if your pet is maintaining weight, you are probably sufficiently feeding.

Make sure to gut-load all food items for 24hrs prior to feeding. “Gut-loading” is giving very nutritious, high quality foods to prey prior to feeding your gecko. There are several commercially available products in powder form, and you can also offer fruits, vegetables, and grains on occasion. Gut-loading will ensure a healthier insect and, in the long run, a healthier gecko. Remember: your geckos are what they eat.

Calcium and vitamins are essential for all reptiles. There are many different products on the market, but a highly recommended product Repashy Calcium Plus as a calcium/vitamin

supplement. The most common way to give this is by dusting the prey just before feeding. Add a small amount of calcium/vitamin supplement to a plastic bag or small container, then add a few food items and gently shake the bag until they are covered in calcium. When dusting crickets, be sure to feed them right away because they clean the calcium off over time. If you offer mealworms or superworms you can add a small amount of calcium to the dish they are offered in. Young geckos should get dusted items at least 4 times per week, but preferably at every feeding. Adults should have dusted food items 2-3 times per week. Egg laying females should be getting dusted food items at every feeding as they are absorbing large amounts of calcium to produce the eggshells. For all ages dust a multivitamin supplement once a week – if not using the Repashy Calcium Plus (this is included). Calcium can also be left in a small dish inside of the tank as some leopard geckos will self-supplement. Lack of supplementation can eventually lead to Metabolic Bone Disease, which can be fatal. Symptoms include very weak, lethargic animals that will display soft limbs and bones.

Always offer a dish of fresh water. Keeping the water fresh is very important so it should be changed regularly. Stagnant water is a breeding ground for disease-causing bacteria.

### **Cleaning**

Cleanliness is an absolute must, especially with multiple geckos. The cleaner the cage is, the less chance there is of having disease spread. If using paper towel, clean the cage every week or sooner if needed. Each month you should deep clean everything including water dishes, hides, the cage and everything else inside it. The tank and any dishes and hides will need to be disinfected with a commercial reptile cage cleaner or a 5% bleach solution. Make sure to rinse thoroughly and ensure everything is completely dry before returning the gecko to the enclosure. The cleaner your enclosure is, the less likely your gecko will contract any diseases.

### **Enrichment**

Living in captivity can be very stressful for reptiles. This chronic stress and confinement can lead to a suppressed immune system and increased risk of illness. If we can mimic their natural behaviors and habitat, this can lessen those risks dramatically. Below are some options to try with your pet:

- Live food dispensers: any container where live food is released slowly rather than dumping in the cage – encourages hunting behavior
  - Do not leave live food items unattended with your pet
- Novel foods: offer new food items – may or may not be eaten
- Ball pit / Box with wadded paper: hide treat / food items for your leopard gecko to find
- Video games: touchscreen or just with lots of movement
- Exercise wheels: solid rodent wheels – can climb on and react to movements
- Fabric tubes: Tube of fabric with one end propped open slightly. Can put food inside, or just use as a new hide in the enclosure
- Ramps/steps: adding new levels for your pet to explore
- Soft beds: Give your pet a soft bed or a pillow

Just make sure to avoid tape, sharp edges, and chemicals. Be careful about disease transfer using anything from outside or another animal. Keep in mind that reptiles can and will eat things they are not supposed to – monitor closely.