

Maintenance & Care

The lizard's home should be spot cleaned daily by removing any droppings while "checking the furniture". Weekly maintenance should include thoroughly cleaning the branches and rocks, turning the substrate, removing any large clumps, wiping down the glass, changing the newspaper etc.

All lizards should be handled with care and with adult supervision, because sudden movements may shock a lizard causing him to run for cover too quickly, resulting in serious injury including the loss of their tail. It is always important to wash your hands with an anti-bacterial soap after handling your lizard.

The information provided is designed to give you a good start only and being a basic guide, it is not intended to replace your professional veterinarian, local reptile expert, or excellent books available by renowned authors which provide more in depth information on specific lizard species. Also, check the Internet for many valuable web sites that contain additional information.

Basic Items for Your Lizard

- Housing enclosure at least twice as long as animal
- Screen tops and clips
- Substrate appropriate for species
- Branches for arboreal species
- Non-toxic plants
- Hiding place
- Misting bottle
- Basking light
- Basking light
- Full spectrum light
- Thermometer
- Timing device
- Heat sources (ceramic heater, under tank heater, lamps)
- Hygrometer to measure humidity

LIZARD BASICS

The fascinating hobby of lizard keeping will provide you and your family with years of enjoyment and educational experiences. The ongoing popularity of dinosaurs and the Jurassic experience has mesmerized all of us and lizard keeping has become a miniaturized version which we can all enjoy together daily in a wonderful family pastime. With your enjoyment comes the responsibility to understand the needs of your pet and how to properly care for it.

All lizards are reptiles, have dry, scaly skin, are cold blooded, and have claws on their feet. Their natural habitats range from the rain forests and jungles of the tropics to the parched and arid areas of the world. Lizard keeping is becoming very popular because of their small space requirements and easy maintenance.

Many factors influence your lizard's health and well-being such as light, heat, humidity, stress, nutrition and hydration. Therefore, it is very important to understand where and how lizards exist naturally in the wild.

Generally speaking, lizard keeping is divided into two broad groups. There are lizards requiring a dry desert-like environment and those requiring more of a tropical environment. Be sure to check with your pet retailer for your lizard's specific environmental requirements. You should also ask for recommendations on good books or other reference materials on the specific species you have.

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Housing

The best home for most lizards is an aquarium designed into a terrarium or as they say in the hobby “vivarium”. The aquarium should be as large as you can afford. Reptiles are escape artists and faster and stronger than most people realize, therefore it is essential that you provide a secure screen cover that has some form of hinges, latch or locking devices that secures all four sides.

Placing weights on top of a screen cover is not sufficient.

Some lizards require special environmental considerations due to their potential size such as Green Iguanas, Tegus, Monitors and some of the larger Chameleons. There are special cages and enclosures commercially available which are ideal.

Environment

The base of the aquarium should be covered with a material called “substrate.” A desired substrate depends on the species and could vary from silica sand, gravel, stones and rocks to bark chips, dead leaves and mulch to newspapers or easily washed down bare floors. The addition of cork bark, logs, manzanita or grapevine branches, driftwood, decorative rock and artificial plants will provide areas for hiding, basking, temperature regulating, climbing and territorial locations. All of this depends again on the species selected in addition to your own creativity.

For ground dwelling desert lizards (Desert Iguanas, Uromastyx, Chuckwallas), sand is a good substrate; for woodland lizards (Tokay geckos, many anole species, skinks, and Chameleons) consider coarse bark and/or peat moss based potting soil. Retreats or hiding areas provide security and

lessen stress. For arboreal lizards (Anoles, Geckos) cork bark, branches and logs for perching and basking, plus other forms of substrate like sphagnum moss over bark chips are proper provided they are incapable of being ingested. Ingested materials may be injurious and cause obstructions.

Do not include potentially toxic materials such as cedar wood/shavings, stained wood, metal or paint. Be aware that lizards nails, tails and teeth can get caught on wire or other materials with small crevices.

And remember that you need to periodically sanitize the substrate so make sure that your substrate material is easily removable for cleaning.

Temperature

It is best to have varying temperatures throughout the enclosure including “basking” areas. Heat can be provided easily with the addition of a special incandescent reptile fixture and an ultra-violet bulb (UVB). UVB light is required for most diurnal lizards for vitamin D synthesis. Make sure to turn off basking lights at night. A timer is a good addition so that daytime and nighttime cycles can be established but it is important to realize that lizards need a certain amount of warmth 24 hours a day. There are thermometers, electric basking rocks, and under aquarium heat pads for this purpose.

Desert lizards require a dry heat between 85°F and 100°F. If the room temperature is kept below 70°F, it may be necessary to use an under tank heater to maintain proper temperatures.

Woodland lizards require dry warmth between 70°F and 80°F.

Rainforest lizards require a warm and humid environment between 75°F and 90°F and a daytime basking area.

Water

Both desert-type lizards and tropical lizards require fresh water every day. This can be provided in various ways and this also depends on the species selected. A heavy, shallow water dish, misting the environment so that droplets can be lapped up from the branches etc., to a special reptile drip system are all various options. Misting is a primary water source for most species, but some species (Geckos and Chameleons) like to lick water droplets from leaves, rocks, or other surfaces. Some species get their water from their food or from pools of water or water bowls.

Diet

Most lizards should be fed on a regular basis almost every day but skipping a day or 2 once in a while is fine.

Insectivorous lizards such as anoles, chameleons, desert species, geckos and swifts do well on live crickets, mealworms and waxworms.

Herbivores (plant eaters) such as green iguanas and chuckwallas 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. The omnivorous species like the bearded dragon should be provided a combination of the above. Larger types such as monitors can be offered pre-killed feeder mice, feeder goldfish, chopped beefheart or raw egg.

Take time to learn about the different diets for your pet lizard. Observe their eating habits to make sure they are accepting the food.