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Chameleon Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Chameleons are **arboreal lizards** famous for their **color-changing abilities, independently moving eyes, and prehensile tails**. They originate from Africa, Madagascar, and parts of Asia and Europe. Popular pet species include the **veiled chameleon (*Chamaeleo calyptratus*)**, **panther chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*)**, and **Jackson’s chameleon (*Trioceros jacksonii*)**.

Chameleons are striking and fascinating animals but **require highly specialized care**. They are sensitive to stress and environmental conditions, making them **best suited for dedicated reptile keepers** willing to research and maintain precise husbandry. With good care, many species live **5–10 years** in captivity.

## **Housing & Environment**

Chameleons are **arboreal** and need vertical enclosures that allow climbing and hiding. A **screened enclosure** is strongly recommended for most species to ensure excellent ventilation, reduce respiratory disease risk, and support natural basking behavior.

**Minimum enclosure size for adults:**

* Veiled and panther chameleons: **24×24×48 inches** (larger preferred)
* Jackson’s chameleons may accept slightly smaller, but bigger is better

Inside the enclosure, provide:

* A dense network of **branches, vines, and live or artificial plants** for climbing and hiding
* Multiple perches at varying heights and diameters
* Secure, shaded areas for hiding and stress reduction

**Substrate:**

* Most keepers use **bare-bottom enclosures** or simple paper towels to avoid impaction and facilitate cleaning
* Potted live plants in organic, pesticide-free soil help maintain humidity

**Cleaning:**

* Spot-clean daily
* Full enclosure cleaning weekly to monthly, depending on waste buildup and live plant care

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Chameleons are **diurnal baskers** needing both heat and UVB to maintain health and prevent metabolic bone disease.

**Temperature gradients:**

* **Basking area:** 85–95°F (species-dependent)
  + Veiled and panther chameleons often prefer warmer basking spots (90–95°F)
  + Jackson’s chameleons prefer cooler basking temps (80–85°F)
* **Ambient daytime:** 72–80°F
* **Nighttime:** 65–72°F (many species tolerate cooler nights well)

**Heating:**

* Overhead basking bulbs on thermostats or dimmers
* Avoid heat rocks (burn risk)

**UVB lighting:**

* **Essential** for calcium metabolism
* Use **T5 HO 5–10% UVB tubes** covering 50–66% of enclosure width
* Replace bulbs every 6–12 months

**Humidity:**

* Veiled/panther chameleons: 50–70% average
* Jackson’s chameleons: 60–80%
* Achieved through **regular misting (2–4× daily)** and drippers
* Automated misting systems or hand-misters can be used

Humidity should fluctuate naturally throughout the day, mimicking wild conditions.

## **Water & Hydration**

Chameleons **rarely drink from standing water**. They hydrate by licking water droplets from leaves.

**Hydration tips:**

* Mist enclosure **multiple times daily** to provide drinking opportunities
* Use **drip systems** for slow, consistent water delivery
* Provide broad-leafed plants for water collection
* Monitor for signs of dehydration (sunken eyes, poor skin elasticity)

Clean water sources and misting systems regularly to prevent bacterial growth.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Chameleons are **insectivores** requiring a varied, gut-loaded diet of live insects.

**Staple feeder insects:**

* Crickets
* Dubia roaches
* Black soldier fly larvae
* Silkworms, hornworms

**Occasional treats:**

* Waxworms, superworms (high fat, use sparingly)

**Feeding schedule:**

* Juveniles: Daily
* Adults: Every other day or 3–4× weekly (species-dependent)

**Supplementation:**

* Calcium without D3: **most feedings**
* Calcium with D3: **1–2× weekly**
* Multivitamin: **1× weekly**

**Feeding tips:**

* Gut-load feeder insects 24–48 hours before offering
* Remove uneaten insects to prevent stress or injury

## **Behavior & Handling**

Chameleons are **solitary and easily stressed by handling**. They are best appreciated as **display animals**.

**Handling guidelines:**

* Approach calmly and from below or the side
* Support the entire body gently
* Keep sessions brief and infrequent
* Respect signs of stress (color change, gaping, flattening)

Excessive handling can lead to chronic stress and health issues.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** after acquisition and **annual wellness checkups** with an experienced reptile vet.

**Common health issues include:**

* Metabolic bone disease (from inadequate UVB or calcium)
* Respiratory infections (from poor ventilation or humidity extremes)
* Parasites (internal and external)
* Dehydration and kidney disease
* Stress-related anorexia

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Loss of appetite or weight loss
* Swollen limbs or jaw deformity
* Wheezing, clicking, open-mouth breathing
* Sunken eyes or poor skin elasticity

Prompt veterinary care improves outcomes.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Chameleons benefit from **complex, naturalistic habitats** that support exploration and natural behaviors.

**Enrichment ideas:**

* Live or artificial plants for cover
* Branches and vines at multiple heights
* Natural light cycles using timers
* Varied perching textures and diameters
* Drip systems and misting schedules mimicking rainfall

A well-designed enclosure supports both **mental and physical health**.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Chameleons **change color** for communication, temperature regulation, and camouflage.
* Their **eyes move independently**, giving nearly 360° vision.
* Prehensile tails help **anchor them while climbing**.
* They use a **ballistic tongue** to catch prey at high speed.
* Species vary widely in size, color, and environmental needs—**research your specific species** carefully.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Tall, well-ventilated screened enclosure (24×24×48" minimum for adults)
* Secure branches, vines, and plants for climbing
* Overhead basking bulb with thermostat/dimmer
* T5 HO UVB lighting with appropriate fixture
* Digital thermometers and hygrometer
* Misting bottle, automated mister, or drip system
* Calcium with and without D3, reptile multivitamin
* Gut-loaded live feeder insects
* Feeding tongs, cleaning supplies
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*