## **YVCipedia REPTILE**

Leopard Gecko Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) are small, terrestrial lizards native to arid regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. They’re known for their spotted coloration, gentle temperament, and ease of handling—making them one of the most popular reptiles kept as pets.

Adults usually reach **7–10 inches** in length and live up to **10–20 years**, with some individuals surpassing 20 years in captivity. Unlike most geckos, leopard geckos **do not have sticky toe pads** and cannot climb smooth glass.

## **Housing & Environment**

Leopard geckos thrive in secure, well-ventilated enclosures that mimic their natural, rocky desert habitats. A single adult requires at least a **20-gallon long tank** (30 inches wide is ideal for floor space). Larger enclosures allow for better thermal gradients and enrichment.

Include multiple hides—one on the warm side, one on the cool side, and a **humid hide** to support shedding and hydration. Substrate options should be safe and easy to clean. Avoid loose sand or particulate substrates for juveniles due to impaction risks.

**Habitat Highlights:**

* **Tank size:** ≥20-gallon long for one adult
* **Substrate:** Paper towel, reptile carpet, tile; avoid loose sand or file soil
* **Hides:** Warm hide, cool hide, moist hide
* **Décor:** Rocks, branches, caves, artificial plants
* **Cleaning:** Spot-clean daily, replace substrate as needed

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Leopard geckos are **ectothermic** and depend on environmental heat to regulate their body temperature. It’s important to create a **thermal gradient** so they can move between warmer and cooler zones as needed.

**Use an overhead heat source**—like a **halogen bulb** or **ceramic heat emitter** on a thermostat—to provide safe, adjustable warmth from above. This mimics natural basking behavior and avoids the risk of burns from direct contact with under-tank heaters.

**Daytime temperatures:**

* Warm side surface temp: **88–92°F** (basking zone)
* Cool side surface temp: **75–80°F**

**Nighttime temperatures:**

* Can safely drop to **70–75°F**

Humidity should stay around **30–40%**, with a **humid hide** maintained at **60–70%** to support healthy shedding.

While UVB lighting is **not strictly required**, we recommend **low-level UVB (2–5%)** is recommended for vitamin D3 synthesis and overall health. A 12-hour day/night cycle supports natural circadian rhythms.

**Heating & Lighting Tips:**

* **Heat source:** Overhead ceramic heat emitter or halogen bulb on thermostat/dimmer
* **UVB:** Optional but recommended and we believe beneficial (2–5%), 12 hrs/day
* **Humidity:** 30–40% ambient; 60–70% in humid hide
* **Monitoring:** Use probe thermometers to check surface temps on both warm and cool sides

## **Water & Hydration**

Provide a **shallow water dish** with clean water at all times. Refresh daily to prevent bacterial buildup. Light misting of the humid hide helps maintain proper moisture for shedding.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Leopard geckos are **insectivores** and thrive on a varied diet of live insects. Offer appropriately-sized prey items dusted with calcium and vitamins. Avoid feeding insects larger than the space between the gecko’s eyes.

**Staple feeders:**

* Crickets
* Dubia roaches
* Black soldier fly larvae

**Occasional treats:**

* Mealworms (moderation due to fat)
* Waxworms or superworms (rare treat only)

**Feeding schedule:**

* Juveniles: Daily
* Adults: Every other day or even less frequent if obese

**Supplementation:**

* Calcium with D3: Lightly dust insects **2–3× weekly**
* Multivitamin: **1× weekly**

Remove uneaten insects after feeding to prevent bites and stress.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Leopard geckos are generally hardy, but regular veterinary care supports long-term health. Schedule an **initial exam** soon after acquisition and **annual checkups**.

Common issues include:

* **Impaction** (from ingesting substrate or large prey)
* **Metabolic bone disease** (from inadequate calcium or D3)
* **Parasites** (internal or external)
* **Dysecdysis** (retained shed, especially on toes)

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or decreased appetite
* Weight loss or visible bones in the tail
* Swollen limbs or jaw deformity
* Persistent shedding problems
* Diarrhea or abnormal stools

Contact your veterinarian promptly if any concerns arise.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Leopard geckos are **calm and tolerant of handling** if socialized gently. Allow your gecko to walk onto your hand instead of grabbing from above. Support their body fully and avoid restraining the tail—**they can drop their tail when frightened** (it will regrow, but looks different).

They are most active at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) and spend much of the day hiding.

**Handling Tips:**

* Approach slowly from the side
* Avoid grabbing or squeezing
* Short, gentle handling sessions
* Wash hands before and after handling

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Provide opportunities for exploration with **multiple hides, rocks, and décor**. Rotate furnishings periodically to stimulate curiosity. Humid hides encourage digging and natural behavior.

**Enrichment Ideas:**

* Naturalistic rock hides
* Secure artificial plants
* Varied textures (tile, slate, smooth rocks)
* Occasional supervised exploration in a safe area

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Leopard geckos **store fat in their tails**—a plump tail indicates good health but too plump can indicate obesity.
* They can **vocalize** with chirps or squeaks when stressed or breeding.
* Unlike most geckos, they **have eyelids** and can blink.
* Wild populations inhabit **dry, rocky deserts** and hide in burrows by day.
* With proper care, they can live **15–20+ years**.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* 20+ gallon tank with secure lid
* Under-tank heater with thermostat
* Thermometers for warm and cool sides
* 2–3 hides (warm, cool, humid)
* Shallow water dish
* Insect feeders (crickets, dubia roaches)
* Calcium and vitamin supplements
* Safe substrate (paper towel, reptile carpet, tile)
* Décor: rocks, logs, artificial plants
* Feeding tongs and cleaning supplies

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center 2025*