

Care Cards

Anole Lizards



Anole lizards were once the largest subfamily within the family Iguanidae. Several years ago, the family was divided and restructured. Today the anoles reside in the family Polychrotidae. There are over 275 reptile species within the family. The green anole, *Anolis carolinensis*, was once the only species of anole found in the United States. Today, several more species of anole have become established within the country. The theories for the emergence of these additional varieties are either they were imported and subsequently released, or they floated here on drifting vegetation and other debris from places like Cuba and the Bahamas.

In this article, I will discuss the group as a whole. Occasionally, species specific information will be mentioned. As a whole, all species of anole are arboreal in nature. Some varieties, such as the green anole and the Hispaniolan green anole, *Anolis chlorocyanus*, are highly arboreal, while the brown anole, *Anolis sagrei*, and the bark anole, *Anolis distichus*, can be seen readily around piles of rock or wood.

All anole species are capable of some color change, although the green anole and the knight anole, *Anolis e. equestris*, are the most dramatic. The anole color change is accomplished by the movement of pigment within the skin/scales of the lizard. In the past, this color change was thought to be purely for camouflage.



Today, research has shown these changes to be the result of various forms of stimulus. Temperature, humidity and stress are just a few of the reasons for an anole to change color.

All male anoles, and females in certain species, have a distendible gular pouch under their neck. The anoles will fan out these pouches as a sign of territory warning. In most species, the color of the pouch will range from bright red to a dull orange-brown color. The exception to this common characteristic is the Hispaniolan green anole, whose pouch is a dark blue color. Anoles also have subdigital lamella, or toe pads. They will expand these structures to increase their climbing ability on smooth surfaces.

Another unusual anatomical characteristic of most anole species is their crest. Most species will have a nuchal crest along the back of their neck and a vertebral crest along their body. The only species with a caudal, or tail, crest is the crested anole, *Anolis c. cristatellus*. This structure is only found on males, and because of this, some herpetologists feel there is a connection between this species of anole and the basilisk lizards. The crest may be slightly elevated as a warning during territorial disputes and mating.

The largest species of anole is the knight anole. This reptile is easily identified by the two light-yellow stripes along its body. One stripe is located on the head and extends from the eye to the ear, the second stripe is located along the shoulder region of the body. The smallest species of anole is the bark anole.

The male anoles of all species will be larger than the females. Female anoles are oviparous. Clutch size varies between individual species, but most only lay one or two eggs at a time.



The females will have several clutches over a period of a few months. Because female anoles can store viable semen for several months, copulation is not required before each laying cycle. Anoles do not take much thought into nest development. Many will lay their eggs on a leaf or in a thin groove in moist soil.

All anole lizards are insectivorous and will readily feed on crickets, mealworms, waxworms, ants and other small insects. Many species will also feed on arthropods, nectar, berries and overripe

fruit such as bananas and melons. Many owners will actually house anoles with their geckos and the anoles will routinely ingest the fruit and nectar mixture for the geckos. Some of the large anole species will even feed on other lizards and tree frogs. New hatchlings will readily consume small insects such as termites. Regardless of the food items offered, anoles should be given a quality vitamin and mineral supplement on a weekly basis.

Because anoles are arboreal in nature, their cage will require height as well as length. Anoles are territorial animals; more than one male should not be housed in a single enclosure unless a partition is provided to divide the cage. One male anole will actively defend approximately 3 feet of territory. Female anoles are less aggressive and more likely to cohabitate in a single enclosure. Both horizontal and vertical cage furniture is necessary for normal basking and hunting. Anoles hunt by positioning themselves head-down on a vertical branch.

The cage temperature should range from 84-87 degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime to 74-77 degrees Fahrenheit at night. The basking site should have a temperature between 94-97 degrees Fahrenheit. Anoles are susceptible to metabolic bone disease; therefore high quality, full-spectrum ultraviolet lighting is necessary. I prefer to use both a strip-light over the entire enclosure and a bulb-light over the basking area. Whenever possible, the anole should be offered direct, unfiltered sunlight for enhanced vitamin D synthesis.

Because anoles are arboreal in nature, they acquire much of their daily water intake from dew droplets on leaves. In captivity their cage should be misted at least once a day to allow for proper water intake. Anoles do not readily recognize standing water. If you choose to use a water bowl, I suggest using an aquarium air stone to agitate the water to enhance the reptiles' recognition.

