

Care Cards

Leopard and Fat-Tailed Geckos



The leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*), is indigenous to India and Pakistan. The fat-tailed gecko (*Hemithysconyx caudicinctus*) is found in western Africa. Fortunately, most of the ones offered for sale these days are captive-born. Both leopard and fat-tailed geckos make an ideal reptile to own. They take little space to house, have simple food requirements, and come in a variety of colors. A healthy gecko will be alert, have a fat tail (approximately 3/4 the thickness of its neck), and bright coloration. Additionally, you should ask to see them eat prior to their purchase. Leopard and fat-tailed geckos are different from many of the “true geckos” because they have eyelids, and lack the adhesive lamellae on their toes.

Leopard and fat-tailed geckos can easily be housed in a 10-gallon aquarium. The preferred substrate for leopard geckos is either paper towels or newspaper. Many people like to use sand or sand-like substrate items for their leopard geckos. These should be used with caution because they may cause an intestinal impaction if ingested. Fat-tailed geckos require a high humidity level and should be housed on orchid bark or a mixture of potting soil and peat moss. These items will retain moisture better than newspaper or sand. A screen top is preferred for the enclosure. Leopard and fat-tailed geckos should be provided with a hide box for privacy and to decrease stress.

The cage should have a daytime temperature gradient between 82 and 92 degrees Fahrenheit. The night temperature should be no lower than 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat can be provided by using reptile heat tape, a heating pad, or a 40-watt incandescent bulb. Avoid using hot rocks, they can lead to thermal burns. Leopard and fat-tailed geckos will benefit from ultraviolet light. I recommend a full-spectrum, ultraviolet strip

light of at least 5.0 strength (ZooMed’s Reptisun 5.0). The day cycle can be between 10 and 14 hours with at least 8 hours of darkness at night. Automatic timers provide a more constant photoperiod.

Leopard and fat-tailed geckos will feed on a variety of insects. Most people either use mealworms, waxworms, or crickets. The insects should either be “gut loaded” 1-2 days prior to giving them to your gecko, or dusted with an appropriate vitamin and mineral supplement before feeding. A deep lid or bowl should be used for feeding to keep the insects from jumping or crawling out. This will also help prevent accidental ingestion of any substrate items. Some people will feed leopard and fat-tailed geckos newborn pinky mice once a week. Additionally, leopard geckos will also consume their shed skin.

Always provide water in a shallow lid or bowl that will not spill. Additionally, a humidity area should be provided to ensure proper shedding. These can be easily constructed by using a small plastic container filled with moist potting soil, and cutting a 2-inch diameter hole in the lid. The soil should be misted daily.

Most people will purchase juvenile or hatchling geckos. They are about 3 inches long and have a brightly colored banded pattern. As the leopard gecko matures, the bands will fade and a spotted pattern will develop. Fat-tailed geckos will have a characteristic stripe along their back. Adult leopard geckos will measure 9 to 10 inches. Leopard geckos reach sexual maturity at 7 months of age, while the fat-tailed geckos take about 1 year. Males are easy to distinguish by the V-shaped row of pores on their underside, in front of the vent. They also have two bulges posterior to the vent. Adult males also have a broader head and neck, as well as a more muscular body. Adult males can be very aggressive toward other males and should not be housed together.

Your geckos longevity and overall health will be influenced by the environmental temperature and the food items provided. If the enclosure is not warm enough, the gecko will either not feed or not properly digest its meal. If the food is not nutritionally balanced, the gecko’s bones will not form properly.

