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Leopard Geckos

Leopard geckos are one of the most popular of all reptile pets, and for good reason! They are remarkably easy to care for, are usually agreeable to handle, and come in an array of colors and patterns. If properly cared for, they will live at least seven years, and twenty years isn't unheard of!

Caging:

A leopard Gecko (or "Leo") does not require a large enclosure. A ten gallon aquarium will house one for its entire life, as long as it isn't one of the "giant" varieties. To house two to five, a 20 gallon long aquarium tank is sufficient. All Leos need a hide box or cave. It is a good idea to keep damp peat moss or Perlite in them to assist shedding. Many people keep adults on sand, but it isn't my substrate of choice for juveniles. Smaller ones do best on paper towels or newspaper. The cage will require heating. Most people use under-tank heat pads. Since they are nocturnal, Leos do not require UVB lighting like many lizards. Proper temperatures are crucial to any reptile's survival. Leos should have a temperature between 85 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit inside their hide box at all times. The air inside their cage should not get far below 75 degrees at any time. In my experience, the vast majority of sick, captive reptiles come from improper temperature.

Diet:

Leopard geckos are insectivores. Live mealworms or crickets are the only diet they need, but feeding the crickets "gut-load" is highly recommended. Some folks dust the food items before feeding, others swear by the vitamin-rich food inside the insect. Poultry laying mash is available at any feed and seed store, and is said to be adequate. To "gut-load" the insects, simply place them in a container with the food and a source of water (potato or cricket drink) for 12 hours; then feed as usual. The lizards will also lick calcium powder from a shallow dish. I personally feed two crickets or mealworms per inch of body length every other day. Others have different guidelines, but this works well.

Cohabitation:

Female leopard geckos can usually be housed together if they are of a similar size. Males will fight viciously, often to the death. Males and females can be housed together in a breeding colony. But it's best to have three or four females for one male. There will be a dominance hierarchy among the females, but usually they tolerate one another if added at the same time. Leos are easy to breed, and generally lay two eggs per clutch. The eggs are hatched like any reptile, and the gender of the babies are determined by temperature. Baby geckos, like most baby reptiles, are fragile and should not be handled until they approach at least four to five inches. Their tails do not regenerate fully if dropped, but no long term health issues usually arise once healed.

If you are interested in keeping reptiles, don't overlook these fascinating creatures!

- Chip Bridges