

# General Leopard Gecko Care: Feeding



An obvious necessity to keeping any animal is feeding it. Leopard geckos are pretty easy to provide for, and I'll show you a few tricks that can not only help improve your animal's health, but save you a little time and money (see sections on raising your own feeder organisms).

The staple diet for leopard geckos has always been mealworms, crickets, or some combination of both. I know of two gecko breeders, both very successful and quite prominent in the sector of herpetoculture, who both have strong sentiments about feeding. One is Ron Tremper, who is known as a world expert (if not *the* world expert) on leopard geckos. He says (in his book *The Herpetoculture of Leopard Geckos*) that he has reared generations of leopard geckos on nothing but mealworms without any negative side effects. The other expert I mentioned is Sean Niland of VMS Herp in Colorado. He says that mealworms are insufficient feeder organisms for leopard geckos and strongly recommends a diet primarily of crickets. Who's right? Probably both of them are right. The point is, there are differing opinions on what the best method is for feeding leopard geckos. I think that if you feed them primarily on mealworms: you'll be fine. If you feed them primarily on crickets: you'll be fine. **I, however, choose to use mealworms, and I do so for several reasons.**

- Mealworms are easier to raise than crickets
  - They don't make noise
  - They don't smell
  - They don't require as much space
- Mealworms are easier to contain than crickets
  - They don't escape as easily into your house
  - They don't escape from a feeding dish as easily
    - This helps you keep track of how much your animals are eating
    - **This also helps keep your geckos from becoming impacted** by ingesting sand when they strike at a cricket and miss (which they often do)



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Regardless of which one you use (and a mixture of the two is probably best) you will have to do two things to ensure your geckos get enough nutrients. First, **you will need to gut load your feeder organisms** by providing them with a diet rich in nutrients before feeding them to your geckos. You can feed them a variety of vegetables and fruits as well as most dry cat or dog foods, chicken mash, or even



some specially formulated cricket foods to name a few. Second, **you will need to dust them with some type of vitamin supplement** before feeding them to your geckos (do this about once or twice a week). You can buy these supplements at any pet store.

## Dish Feeding

The best feeding method for leopard geckos that I have found is, by far, dish feeding. If you keep your mealworms in a dish and allow the geckos to eat from it then it will help you to keep up with how much they are eating and it will also keep your mealworms from getting away when the geckos are not feeding. Just about everyone uses this method when feeding geckos with mealworms. **What some people don't know (or know but simply don't do) is how to dish feed with crickets.** You can do this two ways. The best way is to simply break the crickets back legs and place them in a shallow dish with slippery walls. This will keep them from crawling or jumping out. I started doing this when feeding my red-eye tree frogs and it works out pretty well. Some people think it's cruel, but hey, they're just going to be eaten alive anyway, right? Ultimately, it's safer to feed your geckos this way and that should be your main focus. You can also just get a dish that's deep enough to keep most of the crickets in it without breaking legs.



## Water

Most people probably use a simple water dish to provide their geckos with water. This method works well but has its drawbacks. Leopard geckos are native to desert areas that receive little rain and therefore have little available, standing water. Like many desert animals, they often survive by





obtaining water from other sources, like dew for example. I have found that geckos will readily accept droplets of water on objects around their enclosure much better than they will water in a dish. After a while they will even get used to hearing the sound of a spray bottle and come out to lap up the water you've sprayed around. The best method for this is to just continually spray the same objects in the cage (away from the defecatoria: water + poop = ammonia). I spray the sides of the tank and a few other features inside it two or three nights a week.

One reason I prefer this method to a water dish is because when you have gravid (pregnant) females they will sometimes lay their eggs in the water dish instead of the laying box you have provided for them. Removing the dish and giving them water by misting the cage prevents this problem.

