

Leopard Gecko Hatchlings

General Information

Leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) come from the deserts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and some parts of India. They are part of a small genus of geckos that have true eye-lids. Due to their extreme repertoire of colors and morphs, as well as how easily they are kept and bred in captivity, leopard geckos have captivated the pet industry in ways that few other animals have. Most adults will grow up to 9 inches in total length and can live around 20 years, although some have lived much longer in captivity. They are extremely hardy animals and make a fantastic addition to any reptile collection.

Enclosure

Hatchlings are best housed in a small 10 gallon aquarium, or some type of plastic Rubbermaid tub. You can house several together, but I don't recommend putting more than three to an enclosure, and certainly would never house a hatchling with an adult.

Substrate

Hatching leopard geckos should always have a substrate of newsprint or paper towels. *Never put hatchlings on sand.* Their digestive tracts are not large enough to handle ingesting sand and they will become heavily impacted. Wait until they are juveniles (about 6 inches in length) before moving them to a sand substrate.

Shelter

Keep at least one dry hide and one moist hide in the enclosure so they feel secure and at home. The best things to use are cheap plastic butter tubs or half an egg carton. Keep it simple.

Temperature

The habitat should have a temperature gradient with the low end around 77° F and the high end around 90° F. For hatchlings, most people keep them in a rack system and heat the underside with heat-tape. If you aren't breeding a lot, an overhead lamp is probably your best choice.

Water

The best way to offer water to your geckos is by spraying the sides of the enclosure and other objects inside it with water. Leopard geckos will readily lick up the water droplets much more than they will drink from a stagnant dish. They will even eventually get used to the sound of a spray bottle and come out when you begin spraying. For hatchlings, it is a good idea to also provide a small dish of water so they can drink at will.

Feeding

The food of choice should be crickets, mealworms, or a good combination of both. Hatchlings are constantly growing and need lots of food, but you should never offer them food too big for them to consume. The rule of thumb is to feed them food items that are about half the size of their head. The best thing to do is put a shallow dish in the enclosure and keep it filled with plenty of small mealworms that are constantly dusted with a calcium supplement. You can feed them some crickets once a week to add to their nutrition, and don't forget to gut load your feeder organisms as well.

Health

Leopard geckos are quite hardy in captivity and experience very few health problems, especially if all the previous husbandry suggestions are followed. One of the most common problems, though, is retaining bits of shed skin. Geckos shed their skin about every 3-4 weeks and will sometimes keep a bit of dead skin around the snout and toes. The best way to care for this is to provide a moist hide so that the humidity inside it can soften up the loose skin and allow for proper shedding.

The major diseases affecting leopard geckos usually involve intestinal parasites. A veterinarian can treat this problem quite easily (and affordably) if caught in time. Symptoms include a loss of appetite, failure to defecate, lethargy, diarrhea, and unusual weight loss.

