

# Leopard Gecko Care Guide

Second Chance Reptile Rescue | [www.secondchancereptiles.com](http://www.secondchancereptiles.com)

Leopard Geckos are the most popular lizards in the world, often sold as "easy starter pets." While they are hardy and docile, they are widely misunderstood. A rescue gecko often comes from a home that followed outdated "pet store" advice (colored lights, sand, small tanks). When cared for correctly, these little lizards are active, inquisitive, and full of personality.



## Quick Stats

- **Lifespan:** 15–20+ years (They are a long-term commitment!)
- **Adult Size:** 7–10 inches
- **Personality:** Gentle, Curious, & Crepuscular (Active at dawn/dusk)
- **Difficulty:** Beginner/Moderate (Easy to handle, but require specific supplements and heat)

## The Rescue "Settling In" Period (The 3-3-3 Rule)

Moving is scary for a prey animal.

- **3 Days to Decompress:** They will hide constantly. *Do not handle them.* Keep lights on a steady day/night cycle.
- **3 Weeks to Learn Routine:** You will see them exploring at dusk. Start tong-feeding to build trust. Limit handling to 5 minutes inside the tank.
- **3 Months to Feel at Home:** They will recognize you as the "Food Bringer" and may come to the glass to greet you. Handling can become regular.




## **Housing: Size & Safety**

The "10-gallon tank" advice is decades old and dangerous. Geckos need a heat gradient to digest food.

- **Minimum Enclosure:**
  - **Juveniles (<6 months):** 20-gallon Long.
  - **Adults:** 40-gallon Breeder (36" x 18" x 18") is the new ethical standard.
    - **Why?** A 40-gallon allows for a proper temperature gradient and enrichment.
- **Co-Habitation:** NEVER. Leopard geckos are solitary. Keeping two together leads to fighting, dropped tails, and resource guarding.

## **The "Bad Substrate" List (Crucial!)**

Bad flooring causes the #1 health issue in rescue geckos: Impaction (blockage) and Lost Toes.

-  **Calcium Sand / Vita-Sand:** FATAL. Geckos lick it for the calcium, it clumps in their stomach like cement, and kills them.
-  **Reptile Carpet:** DANGEROUS. Their tiny claws/teeth get snagged in the loops, ripping out claws or breaking jaws. It also harbors bacteria (poop sponge).
-  **Walnut Shells:** Sharp and causes impaction.

## **Safe Substrate Options**

- **Best for New/Sick Rescues:** Paper Towels or Slate Tile. (Sterile and easy to monitor poop).
- **Best for Healthy Adults:** A safe bioactive mix (70% organic topsoil / 30% washed playsand). *Only use loose substrate if your husbandry (heat/hydration) is perfect.*

## **Lighting (UVB)**

There is a myth that because geckos are nocturnal, they don't need light. This is false! Providing UVB light regulates their day/night cycle, boosts their immune system, and stimulates appetite.

- **The Bulb:** Linear Tube UVB (Arcadia ShadeDweller 7% or Reptisun 5.0).
- **Schedule:** 12–14 hours ON / 10–12 hours OFF.
  - **Tip:** Use a smart plug or timer to sync the lights with the sunrise/sunset.

- **Benefits:** Prevents Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and allows the gecko to synthesize Vitamin D3 naturally.

## **Heating: Halogen is Best**

Leopard geckos rely on external heat to digest their food. We follow the "Sunlight Replication" method.

- **The Golden Rule:** EVERY heat source must be on a THERMOSTAT.
- **Temperatures:**
  - **Basking Surface:** 94°F – 97°F.
  - **Warm Hide (Air):** 90°F – 92°F.
  - **Cool Side:** 70°F – 77°F.
  - **Night Drop:** Temps can drop to 60°F at night. This is natural and healthy!

## **Best Heat Sources:**

1. **Halogen Flood Light (Gold Standard):** Produces Infrared-A and Infrared-B, which penetrates deep into muscle tissue (mimicking the sun).
  - *Tip:* Place a piece of Slate Tile under the light. The rock absorbs the heat and provides "belly heat" naturally!
2. **Deep Heat Projector (DHP):** Good alternative. Produces heat without visible light.
3. **Heat Mat (Old School):** Acceptable for supplemental heat, but not recommended as the primary source anymore as it does not heat the air.

**✗ AVOID:** Red or Blue Night Bulbs. Geckos *can* see this light. It disrupts their sleep cycle and washes out their color vision.

## **Humidity & The "Moist Hide"**

Leopard geckos come from arid rocky grasslands. They need a dry ambient environment but a humid retreat for shedding.

- **Ambient Humidity:** 30% – 40%.
- **The "Moist Hide" (REQUIRED):** You must have a third hide maintained at 70%–80% humidity.
  - *Why?* Without a moist hide, geckos will get "stuck shed" on their toes. This cuts off circulation and the toes fall off.
  - *Filling:* Use wet paper towels. Avoid Sphagnum Moss, as geckos often accidentally eat it, causing impaction.
- **Water:** Shallow water bowl changed daily.

## **Diet: Insectivores Only**

They do not eat veggies or fruit.

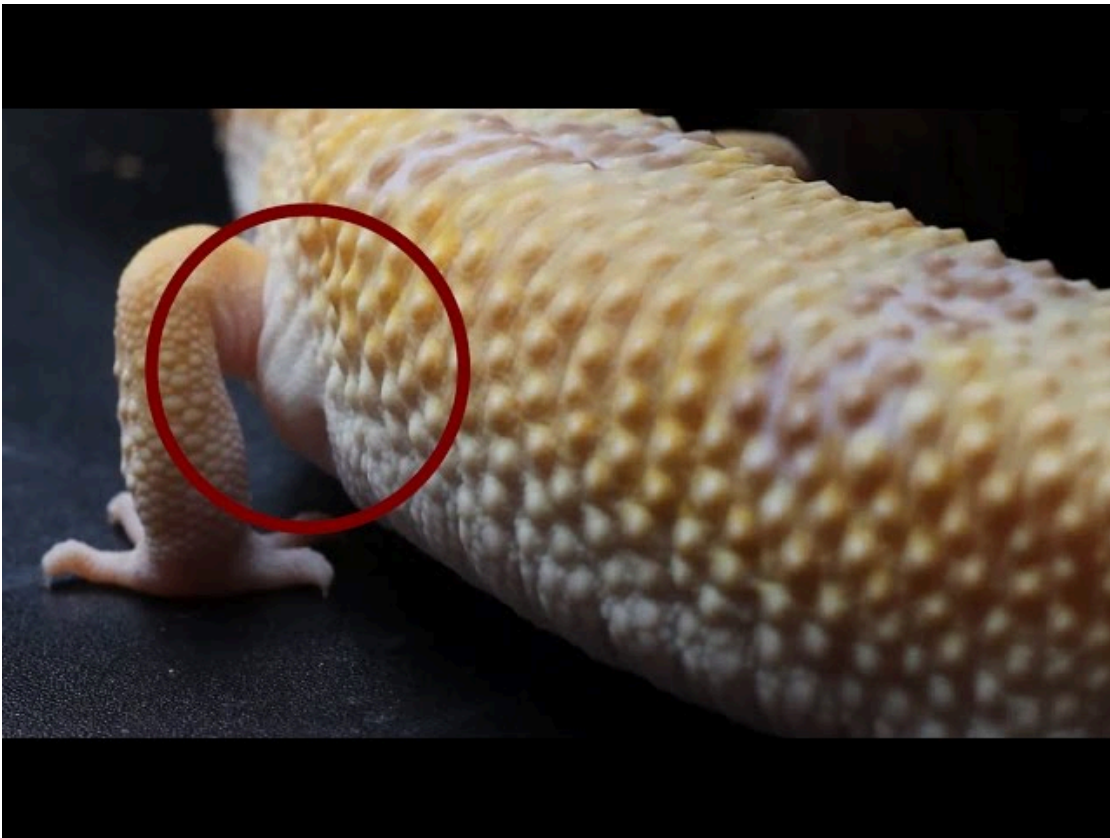
- **Staple Feeders:** Dubia roaches, crickets, mealworms, silkworms.
- **Treats (Fatty):** Waxworms, superworms, hornworms (Feed sparingly!).
- **Schedule:**
  - **Babies:** Daily.
  - **Adults:** Every 3–4 days.

## **The Supplement Schedule**

Leopard geckos need three different powders.

1. **Pure Calcium (No D3):** Leave a small bottle cap of this inside the tank at all times. They will lick it if they crave it.
2. **Calcium + D3:** Dust insects every other feeding.
3. **Multivitamin:** Dust insects 1x per week.

**? What are "Armpit Bubbles"? (Calcium Sacks)** If you see little bubbles forming behind your gecko's front legs, these are calcium stores! It means they are very well-supplemented. If the bubbles get huge, cut back on the calcium dust slightly.



## When to Call a Vet (Red Flags)

- **Stick Tail:** If the tail becomes pencil-thin while the belly stays round (sign of parasites/crypto).
- **Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD):** Rubber-like flexible legs, dragging themselves, or unable to lift their head.
- **Impaction:** No poop for days + dark blue spot on the belly + refusal to eat.
- **Egg Binding:** Female looks huge but stops eating and becomes lethargic.