Crested Gecko

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Thought to be extinct until they were rediscovered in 1994, Crested Geckos are becoming increasingly popular as pets. These cute, nocturnal herps have their own individual personalities, and they are fun to interact with. Additionally, they are relatively easy to care for, as they don't require the complicated conditions that some other reptiles do.

Species Profile: Crested Gecko	
Scientific Name:	*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*
Natural Environment:	Islands of New Caledonia (Southwest Pacific near Australia)
Average Size:	8" to 9"
Average Life Span:	10 to 15 years (captivity)
Appearance:	The Crested Gecko has a flattened, triangular head with large eyes. Its name is derived from the crests (rows of soft, spiny scales) that run from over the eye down the body to the base of the tail. There are a number of different color morphs that vary from solid colors with markings to elaborate patterns such as Harlequin, Fire, and Pinstripe. Crested Geckos will even change color throughout the day, having a duller color while sleeping and brightening in color in the evening while they are awake.
Habitat	

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Size:	20 gallon terrarium for 1 or 2 geckos, 29 gallon or larger for bigger groups.
Lighting:	Crested Geckos are nocturnal, so they do not require UV light, though 1 to 2 hours of UV light a day may be helpful as long as they can move to areas to get out of the light. You will need to use a guarded strip light above the enclosure with natural photoperiods - 14 hours of light, 10 hours of dark in the summer and 10 hours of light, 14 hours of dark in the winter with a gradual change between the two. You can also use nocturnal red reptile bulbs at night.
Temperature:	During the day, the enclosure should have an ambient temperature from the upper 70s to the low 80s. At night, the temperature should drop to a range from the upper 60s to the mid 70s. Temperatures above 85° F should be avoided.
Humidity:	70% to 80%; the habitat should be misted at least once daily (or more often if you use a wire mesh cage) to keep humidity high.
Housing:	Crested Geckos are excellent climbers and jumpers, and they require a tall terrarium rather than a long low one. The accessories you put in it should encourage these activities as well as provide them with places to hide. Perches can include clean branches, vines, driftwood, and cork bark. Hiding places include cardboard tubes, bamboo tubes, PVC pipe, reptile shelters, or anything else that will give them a sense of security. Live and artificial plants placed throughout the habitat will also give them additional places to hide. You should place at least one hide filled with moistened moss or Eco Earth to serve as a high humidity hiding spot.
Substrate:	Peat moss , cypress mulch, or another substrate that holds moisture. Avoid particulate substrates.
Diet/Feeding:	Crested Geckos are omnivores, and they live on insects, nectar, and fruit in the wild. In captivity, you can offer them a variety of foods, including commercial Crested Gecko diets, pure fruit baby food, and insects such as crickets, locusts, cutworms, silkworms, and the occasional waxworm. Avoid hard-bodied worms, such as mealworms. If you supplement your gecko's diet with crickets and other insects, be sure to gutload the insects first and then dust them with a calcium and multivitamin reptile supplement

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	before feeding them to your gecko. Insects can be feed 2 to 3 times a week, and fruit can be given twice a week. Crested Geckos will lick the moisture off of leaves and other accessories in the habitat after you mist it, but you will still need to offer a shallow water dish as well. Change it daily to keep it clean and fresh.
Behavior/Interaction:	You can keep Crested Geckos in groups, but be sure to only have one male per group, and provide enough hiding and perching spots for all of the geckos. Crested Geckos can be handled frequently once they have acclimated to your home, but be sure to be careful. If they are stressed or not handled gently enough, they will drop their tails.
Interesting Facts:	Crested Geckos cannot grow their tail back once it has dropped. They can climb smooth, vertical surfaces with the use of the lamellae on their toes. They also have another lamellae pad on their prehensile tail that helps them when they are jumping from branch to branch. Some Crested Geckos are very vocal and may make barking or squeaking noises.

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