

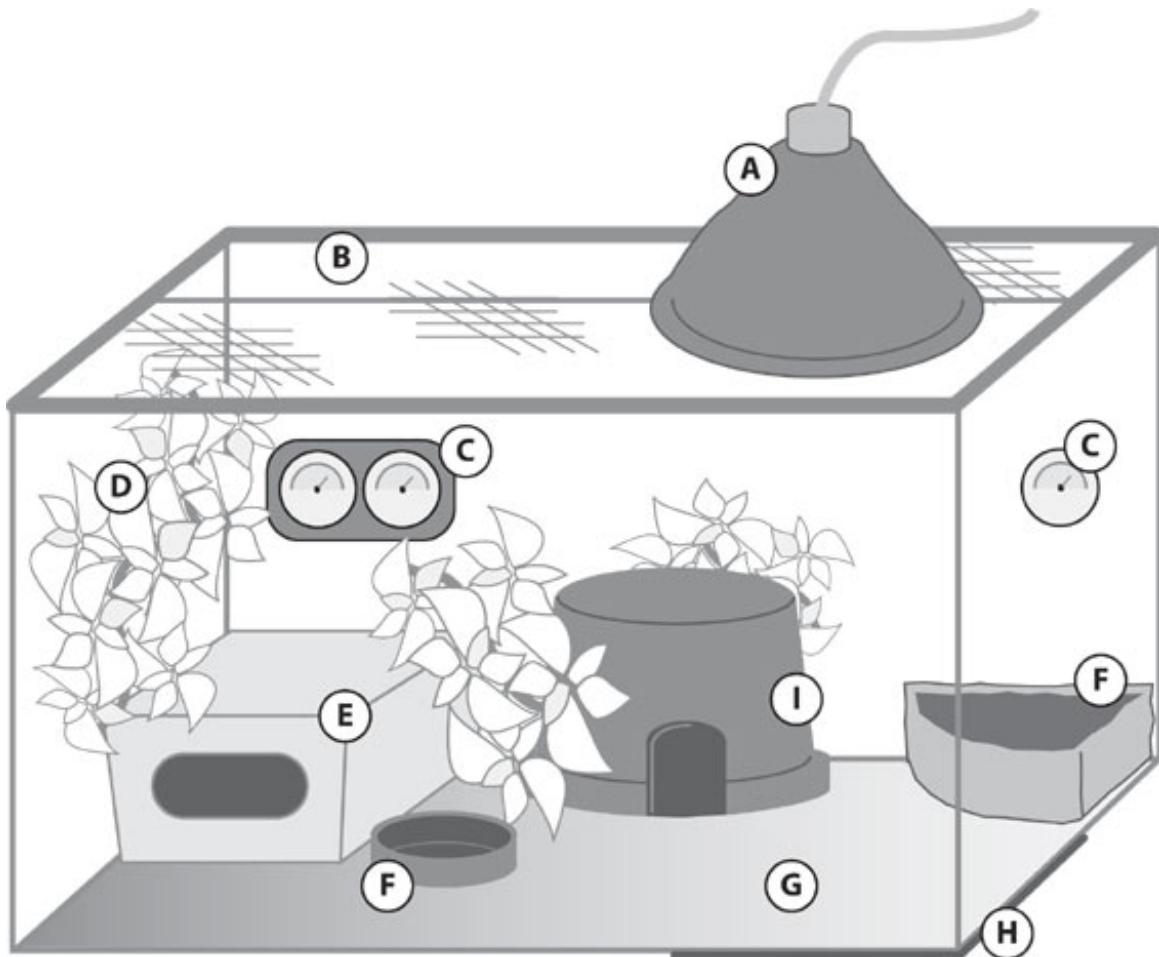
Leopard Gecko Habitats, How to Create

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



leopard gecko habitat

Though Leopard Geckos are some of the easiest lizards to care for, it is still very important that you set up their habitat properly. They have unique housing requirements that must be met if you want to maintain their overall health and well-being. The following tips will help you provide your Leopard Gecko with a healthy, safe, and enjoyable home.



Enclosure/Cage

The best terrariums for Leopard Geckos are those that are long and shallow. The minimum size for one Leopard Gecko is 10 gallons, and you will need to increase the size of the terrarium if you have multiple lizards. A pair will need a 15-gallon tank, and three or four lizards will need at least a 20-gallon tank.

Wire cages are not acceptable. Leopard Geckos must be housed in glass terrariums for their safety and to prevent them from escaping. Unlike some other geckos, Leopard Geckos cannot climb glass very well. The terrarium should have a [wire mesh lid](#) that provides proper ventilation and allows light through.

The [substrate](#) that you use should be

✓ HABITAT CHECKLIST

- A. [Dome lamp](#) and [black](#) or [red](#) reptile bulb or [ceramic heater](#)
- B. [Mesh or screen top](#)
- C. [Thermometers](#) and a [hygrometer](#)
- D. [Artificial plants](#)
- E. Moist hide box, filled with damp [moss](#) or [Eco-Earth](#)
- F. [Dishes](#) for water, [mealworms](#), and [calcium powder](#)
- G. [Cage Carpet](#) or another gecko-safe [substrate](#)
- H. [Under Tank Heater](#) (UTH) if needed to maintain proper temperature
- I. [Shelter or hideaway](#) (at least one per gecko)

non-abrasive and non-irritating to your Leopard Gecko's sensitive skin. It should be something that you can easily clean and replace, and it should not create any type of dust. Improper use of substrate can result in infection, respiratory problems, and toxic reactions. Substrates to avoid include cedar, pine, hardwood chips, gravel, cat litter, sawdust, and corncob bedding. Safe substrate that you can use in your Leopard Gecko's enclosure includes artificial turf, paper toweling, and newspaper. Many people use sand as well, but there have been some instances of problems, including ingestion of the sand and sand in stools. If you are using sand and you see any problems developing, switch substrates immediately.

Landscaping, Furniture, and Plants

The items that you put in your Leopard Gecko's cage will help to make his environment as natural as possible, and the more elaborate the setup, the more you will encourage your gecko's natural behaviors. Things like rocks and [logs](#) will create a natural living space as well as provide him with places to climb and exercise. Live or artificial plants can be used to provide more hiding areas and a more natural feel, but they are not necessary. If you wish to use a live plant, choose carefully - by researching the plant or consulting a veterinarian - as some plants can be toxic to reptiles.

Every Leopard Gecko enclosure needs areas for three things: hiding, activity, and basking. Hiding areas consist of commercial hide boxes, overlapping rocks, inverted clay pots and sections of curved bark, and any other shelter that supplies your gecko with a place to sleep and conceal himself. There should be at least two hiding areas, and the more geckos you house in one terrarium, the more hiding spots you will need.

Activity areas are open areas where your gecko can climb, exercise, or just move around. You can place smooth rocks and wood in these areas to facilitate climbing.

Basking areas can be a flat, smooth rock or wood under a light, and there should be at least one spot per gecko. The more geckos you have, the more basking spots you will need.

When creating the above areas, there are certain materials that you should not use. Avoid using sharp or abrasive rocks, as they can injure your Leopard Gecko's skin if he rubs against it during shedding. Cedar and other resinous woods should also be avoided, as they are toxic to Leopard Geckos.

Temperature

Leopard Geckos are "ectothermic," meaning that they cannot produce their own body heat, so they need supplemental heat sources. Their tank should be approximately 80° to 85°F during the day, and the basking area should be about 88°-90°F. Nighttime temperature should be in the 70s. To ensure that your gecko's enclosure is the proper temperature, use a [thermometer](#).

However, the area outside of the basking spot should not be a uniform temperature. Leopard Geckos practice "thermoregulation," meaning that they will move into hotter or cooler areas to raise or lower their body temperature as needed. The terrarium should consist of several different temperature gradients, and there should be at least one hide in each gradient.

Primary heat sources are used to maintain the overall temperature throughout the cage, and they can include heat tapes, [under tank heaters](#), and overhead heat sources.

Secondary heat sources are used to create hot spots (such as basking areas) within the cage, and they can include red or black basking lights.

Light

It is important to recreate natural light cycles when setting up your Leopard Gecko's habitat. During the summer, they should have approximately 14 hours of light followed by 10 hours of darkness. During the winter, they need shorter daytime periods of about 12 hours of light followed by 12 hours of darkness. To achieve the desired photoperiods, we recommend that you use [automatic timers](#). Changes between summer and winter photoperiods should be made gradually.

Lights that you can use include [black heat lamps](#) (day and night) and [red lamps](#) (day and night). Since Leopard Geckos are nocturnal and dislike bright light, the use of UV bulbs is not necessary. In fact, if exposed to bright white light, the Leopard Gecko may become stressed. Make sure there are plenty of areas in the terrarium throughout the various temperature gradients where your gecko can hide and get out of the light. All light bulbs should be placed outside the terrarium above the lid.

Humidity

Leopard Geckos have very specific humidity requirements to encourage proper shedding cycles and prevent dehydration. A high humidity level can leave your gecko more susceptible to infections. The ideal humidity level should be 40% or lower, and you should monitor it using a [hygrometer](#). Leopard Geckos require "humidified shelters" or a "moist box" to help facilitate shedding. These moist hideaways can be created by lining a [shelter](#) or box with moist substrate, such as [sphagnum moss](#), [peat moss](#), damp soil or other products.

Cleaning

Keeping your Leopard Gecko's habitat clean is an important part of maintaining a healthy habitat. Daily chores include:

- Remove waste, debris, dead feeder insects, and shed skin.
- Remove and clean any objects that have fecal matter on them.
- Clean and disinfect water bowls.
- Remove and replace soiled substrate.

Weekly chores include:

- Clean and disinfect enclosure thoroughly.
- Clean and disinfect interior items such as decorations, feeding and watering items, and any other items in the terrarium.
- Replace soiled substrate.

Avoid using cleaners that contain phenols or pine scents, as these are toxic to your gecko. If you are unsure of what products to use or how to use them, consult your veterinarian.

Because Leopard Geckos are nocturnal, the best time to clean the enclosure is at dusk or during the early morning hours. This will prevent you from disturbing their natural sleep cycles and causing unnecessary stress.

Water

Leopard Geckos need constant access to clean water. Provide water in a flat, shallow [bowl](#), and change it daily. If there is fecal matter or drowned feeder insects in the water, change it immediately. Avoid using deep bowls, as this will limit your gecko's access to his water as well as present a drowning hazard to both your gecko and the feeder insects you give him.

Housing Multiple Leopard Geckos

Male Leopard Geckos are instinctually very territorial, so you can only have one male per enclosure. Females can be territorial as well, but it isn't as common as in males. If you plan to house multiple Leopard Geckos, be sure to purchase multiple females or multiple females and one male. Always watch them for signs of territoriality and aggression, and set up the habitat in such a way that it provides multiple hiding and activity areas. Because housing multiple geckos requires more space, we recommend a terrarium no smaller than 20 gallons for three or more geckos.