



CARING FOR BEARDED DRAGONS & GECKOS

MANUAL FOR NEW REPTILE OWNERS

Bearded dragons and geckos are popular reptiles known for their fascinating behaviors, unique looks, and relatively easy care. However, despite their hardy nature, both species have specific care requirements that must be met to ensure they live a long, healthy, and happy life. This manual provides essential guidance on caring for bearded dragons and geckos, covering their habitat, diet, health care, and general maintenance.

HOUSING YOUR REPTILES

Why It's Important: Creating an appropriate living environment is critical to the health and well-being of both bearded dragons and geckos. They need the proper temperature, lighting, humidity, and space to thrive.

Bearded Dragons:

- **Tank Size:** Bearded dragons require a spacious enclosure. A 40-gallon tank is the minimum for an adult bearded dragon, but larger tanks are better. For hatchlings or juveniles, a 20-gallon tank is sufficient but will need to be upgraded as they grow.
- **Temperature and Lighting:** Bearded dragons are diurnal reptiles (active during the day) and need a basking area with a temperature between 95°F and 105°F (35°C–40°C) and a cooler side between 75°F and 85°F (24°C–29°C). Provide UVB lighting for 10-12 hours a day to help them metabolize calcium and promote healthy bone growth. Use a basking bulb to create the heat spot.
- **Substrate:** Use non-particulate bedding like reptile carpet, newspaper, or slate tiles to avoid impaction. Avoid sand, especially for younger dragons, as they are prone to ingesting it and getting blocked.
- **Humidity:** Bearded dragons do not require high humidity levels, but maintaining a range of 30-40% is ideal. Keep the enclosure dry to prevent skin issues and respiratory problems.

Geckos:

- **Tank Size:** Tank size depends on the species of gecko. For smaller geckos like leopard geckos, a 20-gallon tank is ideal, while larger species like crested geckos may need up to a 40-gallon tank. A longer tank is preferable to allow for more climbing space.
- **Temperature and Lighting:** Most geckos are nocturnal, so they don't need UVB lighting, but they do require heat to maintain metabolism. For species like leopard geckos, a heat source, such as a heat mat or ceramic bulb, should be placed at one end of the tank, creating a basking spot of around 90°F (32°C). The cooler side of the tank should be around 75°F (24°C).
- **Humidity:** Geckos, especially species like crested geckos, thrive in higher humidity. Maintain humidity levels of 50-70% to help with shedding and skin health. Use a humidity gauge to monitor levels.
- **Substrate:** Use reptile carpet, coconut fiber, or tile. Avoid sand or loose substrates that can be ingested and cause impaction.

FEEDING YOUR REPTILES

Why It's Important: Both bearded dragons and geckos require a balanced diet to ensure they receive all the nutrients needed for growth, activity, and overall health. Their diets vary based on their species, age, and natural feeding habits.

Bearded Dragons:

- **Omnivorous Diet:** Bearded dragons are omnivores, eating a combination of vegetables, fruits, and insects. A proper diet includes:
 - **Vegetables:** Offer a variety of leafy greens (collard greens, dandelion leaves, mustard greens), squash, carrots, and bell peppers. Be sure to chop vegetables into manageable pieces.
 - **Insects:** Provide gut-loaded insects like crickets, mealworms, superworms, and dubia roaches. These should be dusted with calcium powder 2-3 times per week and with a multivitamin supplement once a week.
 - **Fruits:** Offer fruits such as strawberries, melons, and apples in moderation as occasional treats.
- **Frequency:** Young bearded dragons (under 6 months) need to be fed insects every day with vegetables as a side dish, while adults (over 1 year) should have a balanced meal of 75% vegetables and 25% protein from insects.

Geckos:

- **Insectivorous Diet:** Geckos like leopard geckos are primarily insectivores. They should be fed insects such as crickets, mealworms, and waxworms. These insects should be gut-loaded before feeding and dusted with calcium powder.
 - **Leopard Geckos:** Leopard geckos prefer live insects and should be fed 3-4 times a week. They may also eat small amounts of fruits or vegetables occasionally.
 - **Crested Geckos:** These geckos are omnivores and thrive on a diet of commercial crested gecko food (a powdered food that is mixed with water), as well as small amounts of fruit like pureed papaya, mango, or banana.
 - **Fruits and Vegetables:** Some gecko species, like crested geckos, will enjoy fruit purees in addition to their insect diet. Avoid feeding them high-sugar fruits too frequently.
- **Frequency:** Like bearded dragons, geckos need regular feeding, but the frequency varies based on age and species. Juvenile geckos require more frequent feedings (every other day), while adults are typically fed 3-4 times per week.

ENVIRONMENT ENRICHMENT

Why It's Important: Enrichment is vital for both bearded dragons and geckos to promote natural behaviors and prevent stress or boredom. Providing a variety of elements in their habitat can help achieve this.

Bearded Dragons:

- **Climbing and Basking Areas:** Bearded dragons are naturally inquisitive and enjoy climbing. Provide rocks, branches, or logs for them to explore and bask on.
- **Hiding Spots:** Give them places to retreat and feel safe, such as caves or hides.

Geckos:

- **Climbing and Hiding Areas:** Geckos enjoy climbing, so provide branches, rocks, and logs. Hiding spaces are important for them to feel secure, especially when shedding or stressed.
- **Humidity Hides:** Provide a humid hide to help them during shedding, especially for species like crested geckos.

HEALTH CARE

Why It's Important: Proper health care and regular monitoring are essential to prevent and manage common health issues in both bearded dragons and geckos. Regular observation of their behavior, appetite, and appearance can help catch potential problems early.

Bearded Dragons:

- **Common Health Issues:**
 - **Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD):** MBD is a common condition caused by calcium deficiency, often due to insufficient UVB light. Signs include weakness, difficulty moving, and deformed limbs. Ensure proper calcium supplementation and UVB exposure.
 - **Respiratory Infections:** Bearded dragons are prone to respiratory infections, which can cause nasal discharge, wheezing, or lethargy. If you notice these signs, consult a vet immediately.
 - **Parasites:** Internal and external parasites can cause digestive upset and lethargy. Regular vet check-ups and fecal exams can help prevent this.

Geckos:

- **Common Health Issues:**
 - **Tail Loss:** Leopard geckos are known for shedding their tails as a defense mechanism, but this can be stressful for the animal. It can also lead to difficulty storing fat, so extra care must be given post-tail loss.
 - **Shedding Issues:** If humidity is too low, geckos can have trouble shedding their skin properly. This can lead to retained skin and constriction of limbs or tails. Maintain proper humidity and ensure a humid hide area for shedding.
 - **Parasites:** Like bearded dragons, geckos are susceptible to internal and external parasites, which can cause weight loss or lethargy. Regular health checks are important.

HANDLING & INTERACTION

Why It's Important: Handling your bearded dragon or gecko can build trust and allow for better interaction. However, excessive handling or improper handling can stress these reptiles.

Bearded Dragons:

- **Handling:** Bearded dragons tend to tolerate handling well and can even enjoy human interaction. When handling, support their entire body, including their limbs and tail, and avoid picking them up by their tail.
- **Frequency:** Young bearded dragons may need more interaction to get used to human contact, while adults may be more independent. Limit handling sessions to 10-15 minutes at a time to avoid stress.

Geckos:

- **Handling:** Most geckos are less tolerant of handling than bearded dragons, especially species like leopard geckos. Handle them gently and avoid frequent handling, as it can stress them out.
- **Frequency:** Only handle geckos when necessary, like during cleaning or health checks. Keep handling sessions brief and calm.

MONITORING BEHAVIOR

Why It's Important: Changes in your pet's behavior can be an indicator of health issues, stress, or environmental factors that need adjustment.

Observe Regularly: Monitor your pet's daily habits, including eating, basking, and other behaviors. Any changes, such as a lack of appetite, lethargy, or abnormal patterns, should be addressed promptly by a veterinarian.

Caring for bearded dragons and geckos can be highly rewarding, as long as their specific needs are met. Providing the proper habitat, diet, and health care is crucial to their well-being. Regular monitoring, careful handling, and ensuring that your reptile's environment is suitable for their species will allow them to thrive and live a long, healthy life. Whether you have a bearded dragon or gecko, understanding their unique needs and maintaining a consistent care routine will help ensure they remain healthy, happy, and active.