



Chameleons

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

There are three chameleon species commonly used in the pet trade:

Veiled Chameleon (*Chamaeleo calytratus*): found in the mountainous regions of Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Temperature range is 68°-87°F, humidity 85-100%.

Identifying characteristics: conical crest along throat, high casque on head, skin green to brown.

Male length 50cm, female length 30cm.

Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*): found in Madagascar in tropical forests.

Temperature range is 70°-90°F, humidity 50-75%.

Identifying characteristics: skin vibrant blue to red, depending on subspecies.

Male length 50cm, female length 25cm.

Jackson's Chameleon (*Chamaeleo jacksonii*): found at high altitude in Kenya, Uganda, and Northern Tanzania.

Temperature range is 60°-80°F, humidity 50-75%.

Identifying characteristics: males have three horns, horns lacking in females, dorsal saw-toothed ridge. Skin color ranges from brown to green or bluish to yellow depending on subspecies.

Male and female length 30cm.

DIET

Protein: 80%, crickets, gut-loaded with T-Rex Calcium plus or ILF formula. Occasional mealworms.

Avoid waxworms because they are high in fat.

ENVIRONMENT

Chameleons should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide.

Lighting: Chameleons require a specific wavelength of light called UVB. It is required for the proper absorption of calcium. We recommend using a full-spectrum bulb, the Reptisun 5.0 or 10.0, manufactured by ZooMed. It is the only brand that has been shown to provide adequate UVB, and emits more than three times as much UVB as other commercial lights. Leave UVB bulbs on for 14 hours a day, and make sure that the bulb is not filtered through glass or plastic. These bulbs need to be changed every 6 months because their effectiveness as a UVB ray emitter decreases over time.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs. The temperature gradient varies according to species, but should have a hot and cool end. Keep a thermometer at basking level on the hot end of the enclosure, and at ground level on the cool end. Provide branches for climbing as well. Never use heat rocks or heating pads, as they can cause severe burns.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Coconut fiber is also okay. Avoid all types of sand, including calcisand. Sands can be ingested, causing blockages in the intestines.

Moisture: Chameleons live in humid environments, and the level of humidity varies depending on species. Misting may be required. Keep a hygrometer or humidistat in the enclosure to measure humidity, and provide a large dish of water for soaking and defecating. Change the water often.

Furniture: Chameleons spend almost all of their time in trees. Provide many branches of varying thickness. Fake foliage and “safe” plants can also be added.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring chameleons in for an exam once a year for blood work and a fecal test to check for parasites. We recommend repeating fecal tests annually because chameleons are prone to parasitic infections.

Common Illnesses:

Nutritional Secondary Hyperparathyroidism (Metabolic Bone Disease): Caused by lack of UVB lighting and poor nutrition. Symptoms include: limb and mouth deformities, lethargy, lack of appetite, and difficulty eating. Chameleons exhibiting these symptoms should be seen by a veterinarian right away.

Bacterial Infections: Chameleons are prone to bacterial infections. Symptoms include: anorexia, lethargy, swellings around the mouth, or a weakened grip.