

# Chameleon

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Ever since the chameleons appeared on beer commercial, their popularity as a pet has soared. What else has telescopic eyes that can each look completely different direction at the same time? And that tongue! It's so incredibly long and fast that after you watch one eat, you wonder what really happened. Yet the insect is now in the chameleon's mouth. The master of color changes, chameleons live up to their name and can change in a heart beat. As a group, they can come in many different colors, shapes, and sizes.

## **General Diet:**

Chameleons are insectivores, so they eat mainly insects such as crickets. They should be fed insects that are the correct size for them to eat easily.

## **Vitamins/ Supplements:**

Reptiles need to have a vitamin/mineral supplement that contains calcium and phosphorous to keep them healthy. This supplement should be sprinkled on the adult's food items at every second to third feeding and more often with very young reptiles. We will be glad to explain how often to feed and give supplements to your new pet.

## **Treats/ Extra Foods:**

Chameleons will eat almost anything that moves and fits into their mouths. In warmer weather, it is good to supplement their insect diet with outdoor insects, especially anything soft bodied like moths. Take insects only from areas where no pesticides have been used.

## **Housing:**

Chameleons grow, and a 15-20 gallon container is a good starter for a younger chameleon, but as they grow they will need a larger container. A screen should be used on top of a tank. It is important that a chameleon's habitat is well ventilated. The habitat will also need two types of lighting systems. One type of lighting has a reptile fluorescent bulb that gives off full spectrum light including UVA and UVB. The UVB is especially important for these reptiles to get so they can absorb calcium properly.

The second light system is for heat. Reptiles are ectotherms, which means they get their heat from an outside source, unlike humans who can make their own heat. Different areas of the habitat should be at different temperatures, so reptiles can move around to heat up or cool off. Chameleons are comfortable with a daytime temperature in their habitat of 72-82 degrees, a nighttime temperature of 55-72, and some species like a basking area of 90 degrees or so. Use a ceramic reflector in a heat lamp during the day to keep the temperature up in their habitat.

If the place you live gets too cold at night, use a lower wattage heat emitter to keep the temperature correct. One area of the habitat for some chameleon species should be a basking area where the chameleon can lay and really warm up if wants to during the day. Turn off the basking lamp at night. Do not use hot rocks with chameleons.

Chameleons like some humidity (50 to 70%) in their habitat and should be misted daily as needed. They will not drink out of a standing water dish. Water must be dripping for them to drink it. Use a dripper system or small water fountain in their habitat. Some branches, vines, or other decorations that they can climb should be used in their tank as well. Do not use any branches from outside, or you might be introducing pesticides or diseases. Use the appropriate reptile litter or substrate on the bottom.

**Sanitation/ General Care:**

Change the water as needed, up to three times a week for smaller containers. The litter or substrate used on the bottom should be cleaned as often as needed, and this will depend on habitat size and your pet's size.

**General Maintenance:**

Mist the habitat once daily if needed, depending on how the dry the air is in your area and time of year. Reptiles will shed their skin periodically. Mist them lightly at these times to help them shed the skin more easily. Be sure the habitat is at the right temperature at all times. Change the reptile full spectrum light as often as recommended by the manufacturer, usually every six months to a year. Although the bulb may still be working, it will lose its potency over a certain period of time.

**Health Care:**

Chameleons are generally very hardy and healthy when kept in the right conditions. Have them checked by a reptile veterinarian only if needed due to sickness or injury.

**Special Section - Handling Precaution:**

Reptiles can carry one disease that can be transmitted to people called salmonellosis. Although it is rare for a reptile to carry this disease, it is always important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have handled your pet or anything in your pet's cage. Keep your pet out of the kitchen area and do not allow very small children to handle any reptiles. Taking just a few precautions will keep the chances of catching this disease to an absolute minimum.

**Supplies checklist:**

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| Fish tank with screen top or screened cage | Water dripping system or fountain |
| Fluorescent light with reptile UVB bulb    | Reptile litter or other substrate |
| 2nd heat lamp with lower wattage emitter   | Vitamin/mineral supplement        |
| Branches or other decorations for climbing | Books about Chameleons            |
| Heat lamp with ceramic heat emitter        |                                   |

