

Mountain View Animal Hospital
129 Main Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452
(802)-879-6311
www.vtvvet.com

Caring for your Pet Lizard

Housing

A common choice for housing a lizard is a fish aquarium. In choosing the aquarium, the lizard's comfort should be taken into consideration. If the lizard will spend all of its time in the cage, it should be large enough that they can exercise. If the lizard spends some time outside of the cage, you can opt for a smaller aquarium.

Another option is to make a wooden cage for your lizard. In order to prevent feces and urine from being absorbed by the wood, apply a coat of polyurethane to the interior and air dry for several days before introducing the lizard to its new surroundings.

Temperature and Lighting

Lizards are cold blooded animals and therefore require external temperature sources to regulate their metabolism. In the wild, lizards spend time both in the sun and resting when the temperature drops. This variation in temperature needs to be provided to your lizard. To provide heat, there are two options: a "hot rock," available at most pet stores, or a heating pad. The aquarium should be raised and the heating pad should be placed underneath the cage on one side. This allows the lizard to choose whatever temperature most comfortable at the time. Light sources provide some heat but should not be the primary source for your lizard. Make sure to check your heating devices as they can burn the lizard. The ideal temperature for the cage is between 85 and 103 degrees Fahrenheit.

In order for the lizard to utilize the calcium it takes in, it must be exposed to U.V. light. Two commercial lights available are the "Grow Light" and the "Vita-Lite." Since glass and plastic filter out U.V. light, the light should be placed within the cage or above a screen so that the lizard does not get burned by the hot light bulb. Provide your lizard with approximately 10 to 12 hours of darkness per day. If you own a gecko, please keep in mind that they are nocturnal and don't require sunlight.

Humidity

The ideal humidity for your lizard's environment is between 50 and 70 percent. When your lizard is shedding, increased humidity makes this process easier for your lizard. Spraying with a spray bottle, a wet towel placed close to the heat source and soaking in a few inches of warm water are all great ways to increase humidity for your lizard.

Cages

Most materials are not proper to line the bottom of a lizard cage, cat litter, wood shavings and processed corn cobs can cause impactions or dehydration. The best way to line a cage is to place artificial turf, newspaper or butcher's paper on the bottom of the cage. These materials are readily absorbent and are easy to remove and replace for cleaning purposes. Lizards fecal material houses many bacterial and fungal organisms, so if the cage is not cleaned on a consistent schedule you leave your pet at risk of disease, as well as yourself.

Accessories can be added to the cage to provide a secure place to hide, a place to rest or a place to bask. Logs, limbs, logs and artificial plants add a more natural environment feeling to the cage and also encourage your pet lizard to exercise (i.e. climbing around, on or over them.)

Diet

One of the main causes of illness and death to captive lizards is improper nutrition. It is important that lizard owners to the proper research of what their species eats and how they should supplement their lizards food to achieve a healthy pet. Here is an example chart of some common lizards kept as pets and what they may eat.

Species	Small Mammals	Birds	Insects	Eggs	Fruits/Veggies
Gecko	X	-	X	-	Some
Iguana	X	X	X	Some	X
Monitor	X	X	X	X	X
Tegu	X	X	X	X	Some

*Cat and Dog food is a well balanced supplement that most lizard species will eat.

Water should always be available for your lizard, however, some lizards are very particular about how they will get their water. Some only drink the dewdrops of misted leaves, and you should know that if your lizard doesn't like the water given to them, they won't drink. Some lizards will also use their water bowl to bathe or soak in so it is very important that the water gets changed frequently.