

CRESTED CARE

GENERAL INFORMATION

Crested geckos (*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*) are a small species of gecko from southern New Caledonia. At one time, they were once thought to be extinct throughout their entire range until they were rediscovered in 1994. Fairly new to the herpetocultural scene, these animals have become extremely popular, even though their export from New Caledonia is now prohibited. In the late 90's, biologists and hobbyists exported a large number and these individuals have given rise to the captive populations around the world. Crested geckos are very easy to keep, breed prolifically without much effort, and exhibit a wide array of colors. These three reasons are most likely what has led to their extreme popularity within the pet culture.

ENCLOSURE

Crested geckos are best housed in a glass terrarium that has more height than depth or breadth. This species is arboreal and needs to be able to climb to the upper reaches of its enclosure in order to feel secure. One adult can be contained in a 15-20 gallon aquarium. Two or more should be given more room. One male and up to five females can probably be kept together without harm, but never keep two males together as they will certainly fight.

SUBSTRATE

Crested geckos can be kept on a variety of substrates. If simplicity and cleanliness are desired, paper towels or newsprint work great. If a more natural setup is what you want, peat moss makes the best substrate. The major purpose of the substrate is to help keep humidity in the enclosure. If you are using a peat moss substrate, keep it a little moist with daily mistings with a spray bottle. If you are using paper, adding live plants in pots is a good way to keep the humidity up.

SHELTER

The upper reaches of the enclosure should be filled with branches, vines, and leaves (plastic or real doesn't really make a difference). Crested geckos will want to feel secure in the higher portions of the tank. Shelters on the ground will probably go unused. If your substrate is a damp moss, your humidity will be fine, but if you are using a paper substrate you will want some type of moist hide so that shedding will be easier.

TEMPERATURE

As long as your house doesn't get too cold or hot, you can keep crested geckos at room temperature: somewhere between 68-80 degrees is fine. These animals don't need special UV bulbs or high-wattage heaters like many other reptiles in the industry. Room temperate is optimal.

WATER

The best way to offer water to your geckos is by spraying the sides of the enclosure and other objects inside it with water. Crested geckos will readily lick up the water droplets much more than they will drink from a stagnant dish. They will even eventually get used to the sound of a spray bottle and come out when you begin spraying. Occasionally, they will drink from standing water, so providing a shallow dish can also be helpful.

FEEDING

There are several schools of thought when it comes to feeding crested geckos. Live food items, like crickets and roaches, are an excellent choice. If you like, you can feed your gecko exclusively live feeders. There are also several powder-fruit mixes on the market that just mix with water. You can feed your gecko on a diet of nothing but these mixes. Some people choose these options and some choose a mixture. Either is fine, but the powdered mixes are quite convenient and provide nutrition that is second to none. Regardless, adult crested geckos should be fed about three times per week and growing geckos should be fed about five times per week.

HEALTH

Crested geckos are quite hardy in captivity and experience very few health problems, especially if all the previous husbandry suggestions are followed. One of the most common problems, though, is retaining bits of shed skin. Geckos shed their skin about every 3-4 weeks and will sometimes keep a bit of dead skin around the snout and toes. The best way to care for this is to provide a moist hide so that the humidity inside it can soften up the loose skin and allow for proper shedding.