**LIvin’ La Vida Leopard:**

Leopard Geckos are terrestrial (ground dwelling) lizards from dry rocky grassland areas of Asia. They are great easy to care for lizards that can be very rewarding if cared for properly.

**Habitat:** Leopard Geckos stay small and do not require large living spaces. A single gecko can live in a 20 gallon tank, or large plastic tub.

**Light:** Geckos can survive without special lighting. They are crepuscular (they are active at sunrise and sunset), so they are exposed to very little UV light from the sun. For this reason until recently it was believed that it was harmful to keep UV light in a gecko habitat. Recent studies have shown that small amounts of very low grade UV can actually keep them healthier. Purchasing the lowest strength UV light and placing it over a small area of the habitat can help them to maintain optimum health. It is extremely important that you do not use UV bulbs any higher than 5% or you will cause damage to their soft scale-less skin and eyes.

**Heat:** Geckos should have an area in the tank where they can warm up to 85-90 degrees. This can be achieved with a tank side heat mat, a ceramic heat emitter (heat without light) or a heat lamp placed on one end of the habitat. It is important that they also have a place to cool down.

**Furnishings:** Geckos are fairly private creatures and appreciate several places to hide. Providing small branches, fake plants, and small caves allow them to feel comfortable and offer stimulation.

**Substrate:** Solid non-loose substrate (ground cover) should be used. Many stores will try to sell sand and tell you it is safe because it is made of calcium. Do not buy into this. The calci-sands are made of non-soluble calcium that builds up in the system causing all kinds of problems. Paper grocery bags, or reptile carpet make great substrate for geckos.

**Feeding:** Geckos are carnivorous animals. This means they will eat insects only. Feeding a variety is best. They should be fed crickets, superworms (zophobas worms), soldier fly larvae, and occasionally wax worms or meal worms. Meal worms should not be the primary food source. Meal worms are low in protein content, but have thick exoskeletons. This means the geckos system has to work extra hard to digest, counteracting the benefits of the small amounts of protein in that food source. The insects should not be too much larger than the space between the gecko’s eyes. Food should be offered every other day. Geckos do not have large appetites once they are full grown and will often only eat 2-3 large insects every second day.

**Water:** Geckos do not like to soak in water, however, they do need to drink water. Providing a small shallow dish of water is important. Make sure the dish you choose is not taller than they can see over or they will not use it.

**Supplements:** Geckos (like most reptiles) need calcium. Buying a commercial calcium powder found on line and in most pet stores is important for the gecko’s longevity. Put some calcium powder in a shallow dish in the enclosure and drop the insects on top. The geckos will walk through it and lick it off their feet.

**Cohabitation:** Female geckos can live together as long as they have enough room. Two males should never be kept together as they will fight and injure or kill each other. It is important to offer multiple dishes and hides for multiple geckos.

**Shedding:** Geckos (like most reptiles) shed their skin as they grow. They live in very dry environments, but when it is time to shed they find moist areas under damp rocks or plants to sit in to help them get with the shedding process. This is probably one of the most overlooked, but essential parts of caring for a leopard gecko. They need a moist hide. This can be made by taking a small disposable Tupper-ware container with the lid on, and cutting a hole in the side. You them put slightly damp (not dripping wet) paper towels or wash cloths in the bottom. Make sure it doesn’t get moldy or stinky. Change towels as necessary, but make sure it is always a little moist and the gecko will go inside and soak up the humidity as needed. This will prevent it from getting scabbed scales on its eyes, or losing toes while it sheds.

**Tails:** Geckos store fat in their tails. A healthy Leopard Gecko will have a fat tail. It should be at least as big as its body, but bigger is even better. If your gecko’s tail starts to slim down you need to make changes immediately. Geckos also have tails that can fall off if they feel scared, stressed, or get grabbed by the tail. The muscles on the tail will actually open up dropping a piece of the tail off so they can get away. They will survive, but it does hurt, and it puts them at risk for bacterial infections, and weight loss. You should always use caution when handling geckos so they do not feel threatened. Be particularly careful to never grab the tail. If the tail should come off, contact us right away.

If you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed here, please feel free to contact Creepy Critters Rescue at anytime.