

Veiled Chameleon Care Sheet

An arboreal species with exacting needs. Get the lighting right and most else follows.

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At A Glance

LIFESPAN
Females 4 to 6 years, males 6 to 8

COMPANY
One per enclosure, always

ENCLOSURE
60 x 60 x 120cm minimum

BASKING TEMP
30°C

HUMIDITY
50 to 60% day, up to 80% night

UVB
Essential, replace every 6 to 8 months

Living With Veiled Chameleons

- **Origin.** The Arabian Peninsula, in subtropical higher-altitude regions and also in drier areas.
- **Telling males from females.** Females have a smaller casque, are generally light green with thin aqua and yellow-orange bands running down the body, and reach 25 to 35cm snout to tail at 90 to 120g. Males have a larger casque, a swelling at the base of the tail and a spur on the hindfeet, duller colouring with thicker bands, and reach up to 60cm at 100 to 200g.
- **Lifespan.** Females 4 to 6 years, males 6 to 8.
- Chameleons change colour to show emotion and to react to stress or illness. The popular belief that it is purely camouflage is **incorrect**.
- They are **territorial**, so only one chameleon per enclosure is acceptable.

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The Enclosure

- Being arboreal, they need a **tall vertical enclosure** planted with criss-crossing branches of varying diameter. That lets the chameleon climb to the temperature it wants and gives it places to hide. Real plants are recommended: hibiscus, Ficus benjamina, dandelion.
- A **mesh enclosure** with good ventilation is ideal. Minimum size for an adult is **60 x 60 x 120cm**, and remember to plan for the full-grown animal.
- Technically no substrate is needed unless you have an egg-laying female. The bottom tray should drain without letting crickets escape. If you do use substrate it must be absorbent and hold moisture: fine soil or sand, Astro turf, paper, large stones or large pieces of cork bark. **Avoid** perlite, vermiculite, small pebbles, wood shavings, wood chips, coconut, peat fibre and coarse sand.
- Females of egg-laying age need a lay bin with 10cm of sand and soil mix. They can lay infertile eggs with no male present.
- **Heating.** Put the heat source above the enclosure, off centre, and create a gradient. Measure it with two thermometers, one at the basking spot and one further away, or use a maximum-minimum thermometer. Set the basking spot about 20cm under the lamp with a barrier so the animal cannot touch it. Incandescent lamps give some visible light, ceramic heaters last longer and suit night-time heat. Basking 30°C, daytime 22 to 25°C, night 13 to 18°C, with roughly a 10°C drop at night.
- **Humidity.** Use a misting system or mist by hand. A hygrometer should read 50 to 60% during the day, rising to 80% at night. They drink droplets off leaves and will rarely use a water bowl.
- **UVB is absolutely essential** to prevent metabolic bone disease. Start with something like an Exoterra Reptile UVB 100, but the end goal is a T5 high-output linear bulb with reflector at 5.0 strength, wattage depending on enclosure size and distance. Position it 20 to 30cm from the basking spot, measured from the top of the chameleon. Leave it on at least 6 hours and ideally across 12 daytime hours. **Replace every 6 to 8 months**, the output drops well before the bulb dies. Sunlight through a window is not a source of UVB.
- Visible light for 12 hours a day, then total darkness. Disinfect the cage and its fittings with F10SCXD and F10SC.

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Food

- Veiled chameleons eat **insects**, and every insect must be smaller than the chameleon's head to avoid choking. Feed growing or gravid animals daily, adults every other day.
- **Live insects only**, and variety is the point: crickets, silkworms, superworms, dubia roaches, black soldier fly larvae, hornworms. Mealworms and waxworms are occasional only, they are fatty and hard to digest. Be careful with garden insects and avoid ants.
- **Do not overfeed.** Obesity leads to life-threatening conditions in this species.
- **Gut-loading.** Insects are not nutritionally complete on their own, so feed them well on fresh fruit, veg and grain first. They need a heat source. Calcium supplement can be added to their food 72 hours before feeding, as long as they will still eat it.
- **Dusting.** Right before feeding, put the insects in a container and dust with calcium powder **without vitamin D3**. Feed immediately and discard anything uneaten after 30 minutes. The powder falls off as the insects move and clean themselves, so the window is short. Do not put a water dish in the insect enclosure, they drown. Offer orange slices instead.
- **Do not feed fruit to your chameleon.** They do not need vegetables either, though they may take a bite out of the plants. Dust a multivitamin such as Exo Terra Multi-Vitamin onto insects twice a month.

Get This Wrong And It Costs You

- **No UVB, or an old bulb.** This causes metabolic bone disease. Replace the bulb every 6 to 8 months even if it still lights up, and never rely on sunlight through a window.
- **Overfeeding.** Obesity in chameleons leads to life-threatening conditions.
- **Two chameleons in one enclosure.** They are territorial. One animal per enclosure, no exceptions.
- **Insects larger than the head.** A choking risk every single feed.

The information on this care sheet is the opinion of the creator and will be adapted if updated information becomes available.