

## Gargoyle Gecko (*Rhacodactylus auriculatus*)

**Difficulty:** Easy

Gargoyle geckos are medium-sized 6-8" long lizards that range from cream to dark brown in color with a variety of patterns depending on morph (a reptile that has been bred for a specific color and/or pattern). They have wide toes that give them the ability to climb up smooth surfaces, and a fringe that runs from above their eyes down their back.

Gargoyle geckos are native to New Caledonia, a group of islands between Fiji and Australia. They are most commonly found on the islands of Grande Terre and the Isle of Pines. These islands feature a tropical rainforest habitat, where gargoyle geckos can be found among the trees and vines.

Gargoyle geckos have a 15-20 year lifespan when cared for properly, and may live longer in some cases. Due to their manageable size, relatively simple care requirements, and tolerance toward humans, gargoyle geckos are popular first-time reptiles.

### Shopping List

- Front-opening 18" x 18" x 24" glass terrarium
- 40w white incandescent heat bulb
- 5.5" dome lamp with ceramic socket
- Plug-in lamp dimmer
- 5-6% T8 UVB bulb, 12"
- 14" T8 fluorescent hood, with reflector
- Plug-in light timer
- Infrared thermometer
- Pressure sprayer
- Digital thermometer/hygrometer
- 2-4" naturalistic substrate
- Live or artificial plants
- Vines
- Branches
- Magnetic feeding ledge
- Small gecko feeding cups
- Crested gecko diet powder
- Calcium supplement w/o D3

### Housing

Although gargoyle geckos are small, they still need an enclosure that is large enough to give them adequate opportunity to explore, hunt, and generally exercise natural behaviors. They are also arboreal, which means that they are a tree-dwelling species, and generally prefer terrariums that are taller than

they are wide. This is why the minimum recommended enclosure size for a single gargoyle gecko is 18”L x 18”W x 24”H. If possible, larger is always better.

Particularly young gargoyle geckos (less than 12g) benefit from being kept in a smaller, temporary “grow out” enclosure (around 5 gallons, or roughly 12” x 12” x 12”) until they are large enough to safely navigate a full-sized adult enclosure.

### Can multiple gargoyle geckos be housed in the same enclosure?

Although there are instances of multiple females or even one male and several females being successfully kept together, this requires a larger enclosure and particularly careful husbandry. If the geckos don’t get along, they can fight and severely injure one another. This is why cohabitation is not recommended for novice keepers.

Males should never be housed together!

## Lighting & UVB

Gargoyle geckos are crepuscular, which means that they are active at night, but mostly around sunset. This means that they are likely to prefer cooler temperatures, are exposed to low levels of indirect UVB during the day, and have exceptional night vision.

### UVB Lighting

Due to the nature of gargoyle geckos’ captive diet, they can survive without UVB lighting, but they do best when it is provided. UVB lighting can be tricky, because in order to get the right strength of UVB (measured by UV Index, or UVI), distance must be considered.

As a rough estimate, to provide appropriate UVB to a gargoyle gecko in an 18” x 18” x 24” enclosure that maximizes vertical space utilization with vines and branches, you will need one 12” Arcadia T8 6% or Zoo Med T8 ReptiSun 5.0 in a reflective T8 fixture. Place the basking area no closer than 6” below the lamp.

*(These recommendations are approximations. It is strongly recommended to use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a UVI of 1.0-2.0 in the basking area at the top of the enclosure.)*

## Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Gargoyle geckos, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. In the wild, gargoyle geckos warm up during the day by sleeping in a warm patch of sunlight. In captivity, sunlight can be replicated with a heat lamp.

- **Basking area temperature:** 82-85°F (28-29°C)
- **Cool zone temperature:** 70-75°F (21-24°C)
- **Nighttime temperature:** 65-72°F (18-22°C)

Generally speaking, it doesn't take much to achieve such a low basking temperature. A 40w white incandescent bulb should be plenty. However, if you notice that the basking area is too warm, dial down the heat down with a plug-in lamp dimmer or switch to a lower wattage bulb. If your basking area is too cool, you will need a higher wattage bulb.

The basking area should be a vine, branch, or cluster of foliage directly under the heat lamp. Because your gargoyle gecko is arboreal and will be living in a tall enclosure, the warmest temperatures will be at the top (near the heat lamp), and the coolest temperatures will be toward the bottom. You will need vines, branches, and foliage at all levels to allow for proper thermoregulation.

To measure the general temperature of different areas of your terrarium, use an infrared thermometer (a.k.a. temperature gun). To passively track basking temperature, use a digital probe thermometer, with the probe placed on the basking surface under the heat source. The Etekcity 774 is a good infrared thermometer, and most reptile-brand digital probe thermometers function well.

## Humidity

Gargoyle geckos do best in a high-humidity environment, with an **average humidity of 60-80%** as measured by a digital probe hygrometer with the probe placed in the middle of the enclosure. Humidity levels that are consistently too high or low can cause health problems for your gecko. However, it is natural for humidity to be lower in the warm area and higher in the cool area. It is also normal and healthy for humidity levels to rise at night and fall during the day.

To raise the humidity in your gargoyle gecko's enclosure (and provide an extra source of drinking water), use a pump-style pressure sprayer to wet down the enclosure every morning and evening.

It's best to use tap water for misting, rather than distilled or reverse-osmosis water. Tap water contains essential minerals that are important to your gecko's health, and distilled water may actually suck those minerals out of your gecko.

## Substrate

Because gargoyle geckos are arboreal (tree-dwelling), they don't spend much time on the ground. Although it's not necessary as a bedding for them, it's very useful for helping to stabilize humidity. It also acts as a cushion if they fall from their perch, which does happen occasionally.

It's best to use a moisture-retentive substrate that is similar to the soil in a gargoyle gecko's natural habitat. Here are a few options:

- DIY tropical mix: 60% organic topsoil, 40% coconut fiber
- Lugarti Natural Reptile Bedding
- Zoo Med Reptisoil
- The Bio Dude Terra Fauna

For best results, add a generous layer of leaf litter on top.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. Substrate should be completely replaced once every 1-3 months, depending on your needs.

## Décor

Decorations play a vital role in your gargoyle gecko's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your pet's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nicer! Without décor, your gargoyle gecko's terrarium is just a glass box with dirt and a feeding ledge.

Branches, vines, and live or artificial foliage work well as décor in a gargoyle gecko terrarium. You can also use spanish moss, natural bamboo, and arboreal hideouts. Arrange these items in a way that encourages your gargoyle gecko to climb and explore, and provides a variety of options for places to sleep during the day.

## Food

Gargoyle geckos are *omnivores*, which means that they need a balanced diet of both plant- and animal-based foods to get the nutrition that they need. In the wild, they eat mostly fruit and insects. As pets, it's best to feed them specially-formulated, high-quality crested gecko diet plus live insects. Crested gecko diet (CGD) is a nutritionally-complete powder that becomes a meal replacement smoothie when water is added.

How often gargoyle geckos need to eat depends on age:

- **Hatchlings and Juveniles (0-12 months)** — CGD daily, insects 1-2x/week
- **Adults (>12 months)** — CGD every 2-3 days, insects 1x/week

Best crested gecko diet powders: Pangea, Repashy, Black Panther Zoological, Gecko Pro, Leapin' Leachie, Zoo Med

Best insects: crickets, dubia roaches, red runner roaches, darkling beetles, snails, grasshoppers

Gargoyle geckos are slightly carnivorous, and offering a thawed pinkie mouse or anole makes for a nutritious treat.

The key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for your pet is VARIETY. Provide as varied of a diet as you possibly can, and you will be rewarded with a healthier pet that always looks forward to mealtime.

## Supplements

Crested gecko diet is already fortified and balanced with a variety of vitamins and minerals. However, feeder insects need to be "dusted" with a light coating of calcium powder to balance the calcium-phosphorus ratio.

There are many options, but Arcadia CalciumPro Mg or MinerAll Outdoor are both solid calcium supplements. For best results, use as directed by the label.

For more information about gargoyle gecko care, read the full-length [Gargoyle Gecko Care Guide](#) at ReptiFiles.com!