

Mourning Gecko (*Lepidodactylus lugubris*)

Difficulty: Easy

Mourning geckos are small, 4" long lizards that range from light tan to dark brown in color, with a cream or yellow-colored belly and a dark chevron or zig-zag pattern down their back. They have petite, pointed snouts. Like other geckos, they have wide toes that give them the ability to climb up smooth surfaces, and they lack eyelids.

Mourning geckos are among the most widely-distributed reptiles in the world. They can be found primarily in the South Pacific islands, in Central and South America, and Hawaii. These areas typically feature a tropical rainforest habitat, where mourning geckos can be found living among the foliage.

Mourning geckos are estimated to live an average of 10 years, although longer is possible with good care.

Due to their tiny size and flighty nature, mourning geckos are not the type of pet that you can handle. However, they are easy to care for and make entertaining display animals!

Fun fact: All mourning geckos are female, and they reproduce via parthenogenesis. They don't require males to lay fertile eggs, and the offspring which hatch from those eggs are essentially clones of their mother.

Shopping List

- Front-opening 12" x 12" x 18" glass terrarium
- Heat bulb, 25w
- 5.5" dome lamp with ceramic socket
- Plug-in lamp dimmer
- Compact coil forest UVB bulb, 26w
- 12" terrarium hood with incandescent socket
- Plug-in light timer
- Infrared thermometer
- Pressure sprayer
- Digital thermometer/hygrometer
- 2-4" naturalistic substrate
- Live or artificial plants
- Vines
- Branches/Twigs
- Magnetic feeding ledge
- Small gecko feeding cups
- Crested gecko diet powder
- Calcium supplement w/o D3

Housing

Although mourning geckos may seem tiny to you, 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.

Mourning geckos should always be housed in groups of at least 2. Mourning geckos are a naturally social species, and do best when they have a companion or few. This is why the minimum recommended enclosure size for mourning geckos is 12”L x 12”W x 18”H, enough to comfortably house up to 4 geckos.

If possible, larger is always better — if you keep the offspring, you will eventually need to upgrade anyway. Expect to increase the size of the enclosure by about 5 gallons’ capacity per additional 2 geckos.

Lighting & UVB

Mourning geckos are crepuscular, which means that they are active at night, but mostly around sunset. They also have an active period around sunrise. This means that they can see very well in the dark, are likely to prefer cooler temperatures, are exposed to low levels of indirect UVB during the day.

UVB Lighting

Due to the nature of mourning geckos’ captive diet, they can survive without UVB lighting, but they do best when it is provided — especially since they need the extra vitamin D for egg production. 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 mourning geckos housed in a 12” x 12” x 18” enclosure that maximizes vertical space utilization with vines and branches, you will need one 26w Zoo Med Reptisun 5.0 compact coil bulb in a reflective hood where the bulb can be mounted on its side. Place the basking area no closer than 2” 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.

Mourning 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, mourning geckos warm up during the day by sleeping in a warm patch of sunlight. In captivity, sunlight can be replicated with a halogen or incandescent heat lamp.

- **Basking area temperature:** 80-85°F (26-29°C)
- **Cool zone temperature:** 70-75°F (21-24°C)
- **Nighttime temperature:** 65-72°F (18-22°C)

It is very important to provide this range of temperatures! Consistent temperatures above 85°F (29°C) can be lethal, and consistent temperatures at or below 72°F (22°C) can cause illness.

Generally speaking, it doesn't take much to achieve such a low basking temperature. A 25w white incandescent bulb should be plenty. However, if you notice that the basking area is too warm, dial 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 mourning geckos are 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

Mourning 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 geckos' 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 or spring water for misting, rather than distilled or reverse-osmosis water. Tap and spring water contains essential minerals that are important to the geckos' health, and distilled water may actually suck those minerals out of your pets, causing health problems.

Substrate

Because mourning geckos are arboreal (tree-dwelling), they don't spend much time on the ground. Although substrate is not necessary as a bedding for them, it's still 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 mourning 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 geckos' enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your pets' natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nicer! Without décor, your mourning gecko 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 mourning gecko terrarium. You can also use spanish moss, cork hollows, and arboreal hideouts. Arrange these items in a way that encourages your geckos to climb and explore, and provides safe places to sleep during the day.

Food

Mourning 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.

Mourning geckos do well on a diet of crested gecko diet (replaced every 24-48 hours) and calcium-dusted insects 1-2x/week. Skipping a CGD feeding once a week or so is not harmful and may even be beneficial.

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

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 their nutrition.

There are many options, but Arcadia CalciumPro Mg, MinerAll Outdoor, and Repashy SuperCal NoD are all solid calcium supplements. For best results, use as directed by the label.

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