

Cuban False Chameleon (*Anolis barbatus*)

Difficulty: Intermediate

The Cuban false chameleon (*Anolis barbatus*) is also known as the Western Bearded Anole. It is a larger lizard around 7" / 18cm SVL (snout to vent length) and a thin tail slightly shorter than its body. The head is large, with bulging, independently-moving eyes; fused eyelids, a vertically-compressed body, short limbs, and a dewlap adorned by a ridge of spike-like scales.

As implied by their common name, Cuban false chameleons can be found on the western side of Cuba, occupying the transition zone between dry forest and upland rainforest. They are categorized as a "twig giant" ecomorph and perch primarily on narrow branches and twigs.

Preferred for their relatively calm dispositions, Cuban false chameleons are becoming more common in the US pet trade. However, there is still much to learn about optimal Cuban false chameleon care and their potential maximum lifespan in captivity.

Shopping List

- 18"L x 18"W x 36"H front-opening terrarium, mesh top
- Dual dome lamp fixture
- 60w heat bulb, x2
- Two-socket rheostat
- Arcadia ShadeDweller UVB kit
- 18" ~6500K high-output LED or T5 HO grow light
- Surge protector with digital timer
- Digital thermometer/hygrometer device with probes, x2
- Pressure sprayer
- 22+ quarts coconut fiber substrate
- Climbing branches and/or vines
- Live and/or artificial foliage (live preferred)
- Magnetic gecko feeding ledge
- Calcium and multivitamin supplements
- Soft-tipped feeding tweezers

Housing

Cuban false chameleons need a terrarium that is large enough to give them adequate opportunity to thermoregulate, explore, hunt, and generally exercise natural behaviors, although they are considered more sedentary than other *Anolis* species. They are also arboreal, which means that they require a tall enclosure. The minimum recommended enclosure size for housing a single Cuban false chameleon is **18"L x 18"W x 36"H**, or 45 x 45 x 90cm. If possible, however, larger is highly recommended!

For the lizard's mental health and ease of access, it is best to use an enclosure that is front-opening and opaque on all sides but the front. It also must be well-ventilated to discourage stagnation and mold growth.

Can multiple Cuban false chameleons be housed in the same enclosure?

Due to conflict concerns, it's best practice not to house multiple Cuban false chameleons together.

Lighting & UVB

Cuban false chameleons are *diurnal*, which means that they are most active during the day. This also means that they need exposure to bright light and UVB during the day for best mental and physical health. Light sources should be turned on for 13 hours/day during summer and 11 hours/day during winter, with gradual adjustments in-between.

Alternatively, you can use a smart timer (I've been happy with [Kasa](#)) to sync your lights with local sunrise and sunset times.

UVB Lighting

UVB lighting can be tricky, because in order to get the right strength of UVB (measured by UV Index, or UVI), distance between the lizard's back and the UVB lamp must be considered.

- [Arcadia ShadeDweller kit](#) — 6-8" / 15-20cm
- [Arcadia T5 HO Forest 6%](#) — 9-11" / 23-28cm
- [Zoo Med T5 HO ReptiSun 5.0](#) — 9-11" / 23-28cm

Your bulb of choice should span most of the length of the enclosure, mounted in a reflective T5 HO fixture such as the [Arcadia ProT5](#) or the [Vivarium Electronics T5 HO fixture](#).

(These recommendations are approximations based on the assumption that there is mesh between the lamp and basking area. It is strongly recommended to use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a UVI of around 2.0 – 3.0 in the basking area.)

General Illumination

A UVB bulb alone isn't bright enough to meet a diurnal species' light needs. So you will need to supplement with a bright, ~6500K T5 HO fluorescent or LED lamp, long enough to span most of the enclosure. This is particularly important if you have live plants in the enclosure, but it is also valuable for providing additional illumination and supporting your pet's general wellbeing as a diurnal lizard.

The [Arcadia Jungle Dawn LED Bar](#) and the [Bio Dude Glow & Grow](#) are my preferred choices for this purpose.

Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is regulated automatically. Cuban false chameleons, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures to regulate their body temperature. In the wild, Cuban false chameleons warm up by basking in a patch of sunlight. In captivity, the warmth of sunlight can be replicated with heat lamps.

- **Basking area temperature: 90°F (32°C)**
- **Cool side temperature: 72-82°F (22-28°C)**
- **Nighttime temperature: 65-72°F (18-22°C)**

Two 60w heat bulbs housed in a dual dome lamp should be enough to do the job for one lizard. I prefer the [Exo Terra Daytime Heat Lamp bulbs](#) and [Zoo Med Mini Combo Deep Dome Lamp fixture](#). If you notice that the basking area is too warm, dial down the heat down with a two-socket rheostat like the [Zoo Med ReptiTemp Rheostat](#). If your basking area is too cool, you will need higher wattage bulbs.

The basking area should be branch or vine directly under the heat lamp. The warmest temperatures in the enclosure will be at the top (near the heat lamp), and the coolest temperatures will be toward the bottom. You will need to place climbing material at all levels of the enclosure to allow for proper thermoregulation.

To track the temperatures in your terrarium, use digital probe thermometers. One should have the probe secured with a zip tie on the basking surface under the heat source, and there should be another probe in a shaded area near the lower middle of the enclosure. Most reptile-brand digital probe thermometers function well for this purpose.

Humidity

Cuban false chameleons do best in a high-humidity environment, with an **average humidity around 80%**, ranging as low as 40% during the day and up to 100% at night.

Humidity should be measured by at least one digital probe hygrometer with the probe placed in the middle of the enclosure. Note that low humidity levels can cause health problems for your pet, but so can insufficient ventilation.

To raise the humidity in your Cuban false chameleon's enclosure (and provide an extra source of drinking water), use a pump-style pressure sprayer such the [Exo Terra Mister](#) to wet down the enclosure every morning and evening, preferably when it's dark. If needed, you may mist again (lightly) in the mid-afternoon. Installing an automatic misting system like [MistKing](#) is strongly recommended if you have a busy schedule.

If you live in an area with a dry climate, it may be beneficial to install a cool mist humidifier or fogger such as the [Evergreen Reptile Humidifier](#) to help with maintaining a high-humidity environment at night. Program it to turn on and off for a few hours prior to "sunrise". *Humidifiers, foggers, and misters must be used with distilled water and periodically disinfected to prevent illness. Never use a humidifier or fogger during the day, as this increases the potential for illness.*

Substrate

Cuban false chameleons spend the majority of their lives in the trees, so substrate may not seem particularly important, but it still offers important functions. Aside from providing a cushion against falls and a comfortable walking surface, the right substrate can also help maintain healthy humidity levels in your terrarium.

Here are some reliable substrate choices: DIY tropical mix (60% organic topsoil, 40% coconut fiber), [Zoo Med Reptisoil](#), [Zoo Med Eco Earth](#), [Exo Terra Plantation Soil](#), [The Bio Dude Terra Fauna bioactive kit](#)

At least 4" / 20cm of substrate will be needed. For an 18" x 18" enclosure, that will take at least 22 quarts of substrate material. 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 3-4 months, depending on your needs.

Enclosure Décor

Decorations play a vital role in your Cuban false chameleon's enclosure as environmental enrichment. These items provide climbing opportunities, hiding places, encourage exercise, stimulate your pet's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nicer!

Options: manzanita branches, ghost wood branches, vines, nontoxic live plants, artificial plants

Dracaena, hibiscus, ficus, pothos, philodendron, spider plant, staghorn fern, bromeliad, and air plants are all safe options for live plants and will help maintain high humidity levels.

Food

Cuban false chameleons are primarily *molluscivorous*, which means that they are specially adapted to eat mostly gastropods like snails and slugs. In captivity they have proven willing to consider alternative prey, but captive-bred snails should still be considered an important part of their diet.

Juveniles should be fed daily, while adults can be fed every other day. Juveniles should be allowed to eat as much as they will day, while adults only need as much as they will take in about 5 minutes.

Best feeder insects for Cuban false chameleons: captive-bred snails, crickets, dubia nymphs, discoid nymphs, grasshoppers/locusts, black soldier fly larvae, mealworms, hornworms, silkworms

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

All feeder insects should be lightly dusted with a 50/50 mixture of calcium and multivitamin powders to correct the calcium-phosphorus ratio and provide extra nutrition at each feeding. There are many options, but [Repashy CalciumPlus LoD](#) is a solid all-in-one supplement for getting started. For best results, use as directed by the label.

Feeder insects should also be gutloaded and hydrated for at 24-48 hours prior to feeding.

Drinking Water

Although your Cuban false chameleon will get drinking water from daily mistings, it's best to always keep a bowl of clean water available on a feeding ledge rather than on the floor.