

Fire Skink (*Mochlus fernandi*)

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fire skinks (*Mochlus fernandi*) are a diurnal, insectivorous type of terrestrial lizard native to west central Africa. They prefer forest for habitat and spend most of their time in and around their burrows.

Fire skinks can measure up to 12-15" / 30-38cm long as adults, and are easily recognizable by their colorful appearance: a glossy red and bronze body with black markings and white speckling. Limbs and eyes are black, and the underside is striped black and white. They have a typical skink build with a long, robust body and short but strong limbs.

Captive-bred fire skinks are known to make more active and personable pets than their wild-caught counterparts. If you pay attention to providing high-quality fire skink care, your pet may live up to 15-20 years.

Shopping List

- Front-opening 36L x 18"W x 18"H terrarium, or larger
- 50w PAR20 halogen flood bulb
- 5.5" dome heat lamp with dimmable switch
- 22" Arcadia Forest 6% ProT5 UVB kit
- 24" ~6500K T5 HO plant grow light
- Power strip with digital timer function
- Digital probe thermometer/hygrometer, x2
- Pump-style pressure sprayer
- Tropical reptile substrate, 45-67+ quarts
- Hides/caves, x2
- Environmental enrichment (plants, hollow logs, cork flats, etc.)
- Food and water dishes, small
- Calcium supplement powder w/vitamin D3
- Multivitamin supplement powder with vitamin A (retinol)
- Soft-tipped feeding tongs
- Veterinary disinfectant
- Spray bottle (for disinfectant)

Housing

Fire skinks need an enclosure that is large enough to give them adequate opportunity to explore, hunt, and generally exercise natural behaviors. Considering that a fire skink can grow up to 15"/38cm long, the minimum recommended enclosure size for housing a single fire skink is **36"L x 18"W x 18"H / 90 x 45 x 45cm** or similar. However, larger is always better!

Can multiple fire skinks be housed in the same enclosure?

Maybe. Fire skinks are solitary animals, so they're perfectly happy living alone. That said, multiple females can be kept together if the enclosure is large enough to give each individual enough space, but males should never be housed together.

Lighting & UVB

Fire skinks are diurnal, which means that they are primarily active during the day. They have been noted to be particularly active in the morning and late afternoon. To help regulate their day/night cycle, a fire skink's lights should be left on for 12 hours/day.

UVB Lighting

Technically fire skinks can survive without UVB lighting as long as they get plenty of supplemented vitamin D3. However, you are still going to get the best results from using UVB lighting rather than relying on supplements.

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 fire skink in an 18" tall enclosure, you will need:

- 22" T5 HO [Zoo Med Reptisun 5.0](#) OR [Arcadia Forest 6%](#) UVB bulb
- 24" [VE T5 HO Fixture](#) OR [Arcadia ProT5 Kit](#)

If the bulb is mounted over mesh, the basking surface should be placed so the bulb is **8-10" / 20-25cm above the skink's back when basking.**

The bulb itself should be roughly 1/2 of the enclosure's length, no more than 2/3. UVB bulbs must be replaced every 12 months in order to remain effective.

*(These recommendations are approximations based on measurements taken with the abovementioned T5 HO fixtures and assuming a 35% mesh block. It is strongly recommended to use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a **UVI of 3.0-4.0** in the basking area.)*

General Illumination

Because fire skinks are diurnal, they are likely to benefit from additional illumination in their enclosure beyond just a heat lamp and a UVB lamp — these are quite dim compared to sunlight! Providing extra light can offer benefits such as increased activity, better appetite, and better hormonal (i.e. long-term) health.

If you have live plants in your setup, a high-PAR ~6500K LED grow light such as the [Arcadia JungleDawn LED Bar](#) will yield the best results. If you don't have live plants, one or two ~6500K T5 HO grow lights such as the [Vivarium Electronics T5 HO Dual Bulb Light Strip](#) will work well. Your daylight lamp should span 75-100% of the enclosure's length.

Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Fire skinks, however, are cold-blooded, and more specifically they are *poikilothermic*, which means they need to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. In

the wild, fire skinks generally warm up by basking in the sun. In captivity, sunlight can be replicated with a white heat lamp.

- **Basking temperature:** 92-96°F (33-35.5°C)
- **Cool zone temperature:** 75-85°F (24-29°C)
- **Nighttime temperature:** 70-75°F (21-24°C)

You will need one or two ~50w halogen heat bulbs for basking, such as the [Arcadia Halogen Heat Lamp](#) or the [Zoo Med Repti Tuff Halogen](#) bulb in a dimmable dome lamp such as the [Fluker's 5.5" Dimmable Clamp Lamp](#). This wattage should be plenty, but results will vary based on your room temperature. If you notice that things are too warm, dial down the heat down or switch to a lower wattage bulb (in this case, an incandescent rather than a halogen). If your basking area is too cool, you will need a higher wattage bulb.

To track enclosure temperatures, use two digital probe thermometers, with one probe on the basking surface and the other probe on the cool end. Most reptile-brand digital probe thermometers function well.

Humidity

Fire skinks should have **average humidity levels between 60-70%**. Ambient humidity should be tracked via digital probe hygrometer with the probe placed in the middle of the setup.

To raise the humidity in your enclosure, you can use a pressure sprayer like the [Exo Terra Mister](#) to mist the habitat every evening and morning, as well as possibly in the middle of the day. Alternatively you can install a [Mistking automatic misting system](#). The enclosure should be well ventilated enough to dry out a bit between mistings.

It's good practice to use a reptile humidifier/fogger at night to help maintain high nightly humidity levels (if you need the help). Make sure to use reverse-osmosis or distilled water, and thoroughly clean out and sanitize the humidifier with veterinary-grade disinfectant like [Rescue](#) or [F10SC](#) weekly to prevent illness. For optimal results, connect your fogger to a humidistat such as the [Inkbird](#) brand.

Substrate

Substrate is an important part of a fire skink terrarium because this species likes to burrow and hang out in their tunnels. A good substrate also helps maintain optimal humidity levels and creates a natural humid hide. It's best to use a moisture-retentive substrate that is similar to tropical soil.

Here are some reliable options: DIY mix (40% organic topsoil, 40% coconut fiber, 20% fine sand), [Zoo Med Reptisoil](#), [Zoo Med Eco Earth](#), [Exo Terra Plantation Soil](#)

You will need 4-6" / 10-15cm of substrate for your skink to dig around in.

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.

Décor

Decorations play a vital role in your skink's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your pet's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing, so don't be afraid to go a little crazy! And, of course, they make the enclosure look nicer!

Here are some ideas to get you started: (secured) rock stacks, hollow logs, cork flats, low branches, extra hides, live or artificial plants

Arrange these items in a way that encourages your skink to climb and explore, offers plenty of shelter, and creates areas of both light and shade.

Food

Fire skinks are carnivores with a heavy bias toward insects, which means that they need a varied diet of primarily insects to get the right nutrition. Juvenile fire skinks should be fed daily to every other day, while full-grown adults should be fed 2x/week. Offer as many insects as the lizard is capable of eating in a 5-minute period, with each feeder being no larger than the animal's head.

Best feeders for fire skinks: crickets, isopods, dubia roaches, discoid roaches, mealworms and beetles, superworms and beetles, earthworms, hornworms, silkworms, feeder geckos, feeder anoles

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. Treat options include pinky mice, quail eggs, and berries.

Supplements

Feeder insects need to be “dusted” with a light coating of calcium powder before every feeding to balance their calcium-phosphorus ratio, and adding a multivitamin to the routine helps prevent deficiencies from developing.

There are many options, but [Repashy CalciumPlus](#) is a solid all-in-one supplement for getting started. For best results, use as directed by the label.

Drinking Water

Always keep a small bowl of clean water available for your skink. This bowl should be scrubbed out with veterinary disinfectant such as [Rescue](#) or [F10SC](#) weekly for good hygiene.