

CRESTED GECKO AND GARGOYLE GECKO CARE INFORMATION

CrestedGecko.com

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The Crested Gecko (*Rhacodactylus ciliatus*) has become increasingly popular among reptile enthusiasts over the last several years. Thought to be extinct until 1994, they are now fairly common in captivity. These geckos, from the New Caledonian Islands near Australia, make excellent pets. They are extremely hardy, easy to keep and handle, and come in a variety of beautiful colors and patterns.

Gargoyle Geckos (*Rhacodactylus auriculatus*) are very similar in size, care and breeding to Cresteds. These geckos are quickly catching on with gecko enthusiasts. Color and patterns such as striped, orange/red blotch, and others are becoming available.

The following is a brief summary of their care, maintenance, and breeding. Unless noted, the information below will work for both Cresteds and Gargoyles:

Acclimating New Geckos: When you receive your new crested gecko, it may take some time for it to adjust to its new surroundings. Geckos can get stressed from being shipped, then placed in a strange environment. This may cause them to go off-feed for several days or more. As long as you set the environment up properly, the gecko should settle in after awhile. One stress factor is the cage type. Most breeders keep their geckos in plastic boxes in a rack system. There is no overhead light other than the ambient room light. Their hot spot comes from heat tape underneath their box. Geckos raised under these conditions usually do very well. The problem is that most pet owners prefer to keep their geckos in a glass tank. They can be decorated much nicer and are better for viewing the animals. The problem is that geckos don't like change. They may be stressed by the glass. The stress level may go up even more if a bright daytime bulb is being used as the primary heat source. Crested Geckos don't like bright light. It will cause them to hide whenever it is on. The best way to acclimate geckos to a glass tank is to do the following: 1: If you use a bulb, make sure it is a red or blue bulb designs for low light emissions such as a nocturnal reptile bulb. A heat pad can also be used to provide "belly heat". 2: Make sure the gecko has a warm, dark, and somewhat humid hiding place. Geckos need to hide to feel secure. 3: Handle them very

infrequently, if at all, for at least the first 2 weeks. 4: Tape black construction paper or cardboard to all 4 sides of the outside of the tank. Every week, remove one side of cardboard. After a month, all 4 sides will be removed. This will give the gecko time to adjust to the new cage. 5: Try to feed it the same food type it was eating at the breeder's. Dietary changes can be stressful on crested geckos. 6: If you have geckos and you want to add a new one, keep the new gecko separate for at least 30 days to let it acclimate, and to watch for signs of health concerns. 7: If you put several geckos in one cage, make sure they are approximately the same size. Keep an eye on their food intake to make sure they are all feeding and maintaining good bodyweight. Never, ever put more than one male in a cage, no matter how big the cage is.

Cage Setup: Crested Geckos do well in either a simple, hygienic cage, or an elaborate, naturalistic setup. If your purpose is to display them, you may want to take a naturalistic approach. In the wild, these geckos live in rainforests. They can be found both on the ground or high in the tree canopy. It is very important to give them similar conditions in captivity. This includes a substrate of peat moss, cypress mulch, or other bedding that will keep the humidity high. Also, include hiding and perching places such as clean branches, driftwood, corkbark, and live or artificial plants. 20 gallon tall aquariums are perfect for single geckos or pairs. 29 gallons and larger cages are needed for larger groups. There are many types of reptile-specific cages on the market as well. Be sure to choose one that is tall so the geckos will have vertical space to climb.

If you plan to keep large numbers of geckos, you may want to try a simple, easy maintenance setup. The substrate can be newspaper or paper towel. Cardboard tubes and PVC pipe can be used as hiding places. A small plastic box with moist peat moss and a small entry hole cut in the lid can be used as a humid hiding place or egg deposition site.

Temperatures: Although they come from a tropical environment, Crested Geckos prefer cooler temperatures. During the day, temperatures in the upper 70s and low 80s is ideal. This can drop to the mid 70s or even upper 60s at night. Crested Geckos will become stressed if exposed to temperatures above 85.. Hatchlings and juveniles are more fragile than adults when it comes to temperature extremes. In most cases, room temperature is fine, although a low wattage red or blue bulb, or an undertank heating pad made for reptiles can be used to provide a little extra warmth.

Food and Feeding: One of the biggest advantages to these geckos have over most other small lizards is that their feeding is not restricted to insects. Fruit babyfood, such as peach or apricot is readily eaten. This should not be used as the only food source for crested geckos because it lacks protein, calcium and other vitamins and minerals. There are several powdered Crested Gecko diets on the market today. We normally use the Repashy Superfood's Crested Gecko Diet. It's a powder that contains vitamins, minerals, protein, bee pollen, spirulina and other nutritious food

for Crested Geckos. There are also several flavors of fruit supplements that can be added to the base diet such as apricot, peach, banana, strawberry, kiwi, and several others. Crested Geckos can be raised on this diet exclusively. It is not necessary to feed crickets to the geckos, although extra variety is never a bad idea. A good feeding regimen is to give them crickets twice a week and babyfood mixed with Crested Gecko Diet twice a week. This schedule will give the gecko a fast growth rate and will allow a hatchling to reach maturity in about 9-12 months. It is important not to overfeed, as extra crickets crawling in the cage will stress them. Feed each gecko five or six crickets that are each about 1/2 the size of the gecko's head. Dust the crickets with a calcium and multivitamin mix with each feeding. Make sure to use both a calcium AND a multivitamin powder as these provide different vitamins and minerals. The easiest way to ensure that your crickets are properly supplemented is to use the T Rex Leopard Gecko ICB supplement. It's designed for Leopard Geckos, but works great for Cresteds and most other insect eating lizards. It contains vitamins, calcium and other ingredients that will enhance your gecko's diet. Babyfood should be offered in a low dish or jar lid. Generally, each adult gecko will consume about one tablespoon per feeding. A small water bowl should also be offered. Make sure this is not deep as babies can easily drown if they fall in. Spray the cage with water once or twice a day. Crested Geckos tend to be more active after spraying, especially at night.

Handling: These geckos tend to be fairly easy to handle. However, there are some individuals that are flighty and may try to bite. As a rule, Crested Geckos will allow gentle handling several times a week. Care should be taken when handling. Rough handling is stressful and may cause them to drop their tail. The tail will not re-grow if it is lost.

Raising Babies: Juveniles are best raised in small, plastic shoe boxes with paper towel as a substrate. They should be given a hiding place and a shallow water bowl. Feed them at about the same frequency as the adults. Make sure there are no extra crickets in the cage to stress the gecko. Also, keep the temperature within the safe range, as babies to heat stress easier than adults. GARGOYLES should be raised individually as they tend to bite the tails off their cage-mates.

Longevity: Since Crested Geckos have only been in captivity for several years, it is not known how long they may live. It is suspected that their average lifespan in ideal conditions is about 10-15 years. Some individuals may live much longer, possibly up to 20 years or more.

Sexing: Crested Gecko cannot be accurately sexed until about 5 months of age. At that time, males develop large hemipenial bulges at the base of the tail. Females have a slight bulge or none at all. Please see the photos at the bottom of this page for examples.

Breeding: Both Cresteds and Gargoyles are very easy to breed. Males and females should be approximately 35-40 grams before breeding is attempted. This usually

takes 9-12 months. It is best to raise the males away from the females until they are mature. Once they are mature, they can be placed together. It is important to watch for signs of aggression during this time. Be absolutely sure you are not placing more than one male in a cage. Males are extremely aggressive towards each other. It is helpful to put your geckos through a cool-down prior to breeding. In late fall or early winter, turn the room temperatures down to the upper 60s and turn off any heat source on the cage itself. Keep them at this temperature for 6-8 weeks. You should feed them twice a week, but they may not eat much at this time. Once you warm the room back up and turn their heat sources on, they should begin laying eggs in their nest boxes. Females will usually lay every 3-6 weeks. Crested Geckos will lay up to 18 eggs per season. Gargoyles seem to have a lower reproductive rate, only laying 6-10 eggs per season.

Incubation/Hatchling: Check your nest boxes for eggs every other day. Healthy eggs will be pure white and have a solid feel. Any small, spongy eggs will most likely be infertile. Eggs need to be placed in a deli cup or other small plastic container with about 1-2 inches of perlite or coarse-grade vermiculite. This needs to have water added to it in a 1:1 ratio by weight. It must be moist enough to pack when a handful is squeezed, but no water should drip out. It takes a little practice to get the consistency right. If it is too moist, the eggs will tend to take up too much water and mold. If it is too dry, the eggs will usually shrivel and dry up. You'll want one or two tiny holes in the side of the container to provide fresh air. If you have more airholes, you will lose too much moisture, which may kill the eggs. Eggs should be incubated at 74-80 degrees. They will hatch in 6-12 weeks. Temperatures closer to 80 will make them hatch quicker. Most "reptile room" temperatures should be warm enough so that you can put the egg containers on a shelf. If the room is cooler than 74, you may want to purchase a Hovabator incubator. These are inexpensive and can be purchased at most reptile supply companies. Make sure this is set up and calibrated before you need to put eggs in them. When the babies hatch, you can set them up individually in plastic shoeboxes. You may house Crested Gecko babies in small groups as long as they are similar in size, and lots of hiding places are available. They should start feeding 3-4 days after they hatch.

This information should be enough to get you started. For more information, especially about the color morphs, we recommend "**Rhacodactylus: A Complete Guide to Their Selection and Care**" by deVosjoli, Fast, and Repashy.