

Owning a Lizard

What would be a good first lizard? Would it get along with my dog?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

Hello, my name is Bryce. I'm planning to get a pet lizard, but I have a 7-pound dog. My mom is worried the lizard might get out of the 10-gallon tank I have. Could you please help me out, and give me some suggestions? Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail.

Well, Bryce, the best advice I can give you is to ask your mother to go with you to visit some local pet stores to talk to a knowledgeable store worker. Purchasing a secure top for your aquarium should be easy to accomplish. That is a standard-size aquarium, and most pet retailers should have locking tops in stock.

However, owning a lizard requires much more than simply having an escape-proof aquarium top. Lizards require a heat source, a light source (that also might include a special fluorescent light bulb that produces UVB), some sort of substrate for the bottom of the tank, food (either live insects or fresh produce, and some sort of pelleted diet), at least two thermometers/hygrometers (to measure the tank temperature and humidity levels), food and water bowls and any cage furniture, such as a hide box or sticks to climb. All of this is necessary to ensure that your lizard has everything it needs to stay healthy.

Talk to your mother and ask if she is willing to provide all of the things your lizard will need in addition to purchasing your lizard. Without these necessary items to provide heat and light, you probably won't have your lizard for very long. I'm not trying to frighten you, but I also don't want you to be disappointed if you purchase a lizard and it dies because it was not provided for properly.

Some small lizards will do quite well in a 10-gallon aquarium, but others, such as chameleons, will do better in a mesh enclosure. However, unless you plan to purchase a larger enclosure as your lizard grows, you will be limited to owning an anole, gecko or other small lizard, such as a skink. Green iguanas and bearded dragons will grow too large to spend their lives in a 10-gallon aquarium.

With an aquarium fitted with a secure top, your dog won't be an issue. Most dogs aren't interested in lizards. However, there are exceptions. You will need to keep an eye on your little dog to make sure it doesn't jump up and try to knock the tank over.

I hope you can get the lizard you want and this will all work out with your family and dog.

Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at www.arav.com. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.