

Anorectic Gecko Lizard

Why won't my reptile eat? Is it because of the new surroundings?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I recently purchased two leopard geckos, one normal and one albino. They are about 4 years old. When they were in the shop, I watched them both eat, and they ate fine. When I got them home for a few days, they didn't eat straight away, which is understandable as they were settling in.

I've now had them just over a week, and the normal gecko comes out at feeding time, which is around the same time every night, and eats happily. The albino doesn't seem to eat at all; she stays in the hidebox. The normal gecko tends to eat most of the feeder insects, so there isn't a great deal left for the albino anyway. The albino doesn't get excited or motivated at all. I'm really concerned.

Another question I have: Do lizards eat any type of vegetable or fruit?

First, let's make sure that you are keeping your new lizards at the correct temperature range and humidity and that the environment that you have provided is adequate.

Leopard geckos do well in a 10- to 20-gallon aquarium, with smooth aquarium stones, newspaper or other suitable substrate, rocks for cover, a hidebox and a water bowl. A shallow plastic container filled with moist vermiculite serves as a hidebox and an area of high humidity to aid in shedding. It is also a convenient place for females to lay their eggs.

The cage temperature should be between 70 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit. You should have two thermometers/hygrometers to accurately measure the temperature in two areas of the habitat. You may need to use heat tapes, heat strips, heating pads or hot rocks to achieve the correct temperature range. If you are keeping your lizards too cold, they may not eat well, or correctly digest their food.

You didn't say what you are feeding them. You should be offering gut-loaded crickets, mealworms, waxworms and other insects that you can catch during spring, summer and fall. They can also be fed a pinky mouse every other week.

Leopard geckos are insectivorous, meaning that they normally eat insects as the majority of the diet. Insects can be dusted with a calcium supplement and once or twice a week; a multivitamin supplement should be dusted onto the insects, as well.

Because one of your geckos is eating, and the other is not, I think you should make an appointment with a herp vet to have both of them examined and tested. If possible, bring in fresh fecal droppings for parasite examination. Make sure that you allow your vet to perform any recommended tests, if possible. If your budget does not allow this, discuss this with your vet, to find out what needs to be done for the immediate health of your lizards. The albino one may need medications, and both may be affected, with only one showing the clinical sign of anorexia.

Please don't wait. Make an appointment today with a herp vet. If your husbandry needs correction, please correct that immediately, which may help. Don't handle them, which may add to their stress level.

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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.