

Is this the right pet for me?

Keeping a lizard as a pet can be a wonderful experience. They each have their own personalities and learn to recognise their owners. With the variety of lizard species now available there is bound to be one that suits everyone. In addition they are relatively inexpensive to keep once their enclosure is set up. If housed correctly your lizard should bring you many years of enjoyment. Beware though ... keeping and caring for a lizard is addictive and often one is not enough!

Recommended for...

- Teenagers and adults.
- People with limited space.
- People after something a little different as a pet.

Lifespan

Up to 15 years depending on the species.

Feeding

Lizards eat a variety of foods of plant and animal origin. They can be fed insects such as crickets, cockroaches, beetles and worms along with fruits and vegetables including Asian greens, dandelions, squash, carrots, beans, apple, pear and melon. Food should be dusted with a calcium and multivitamin powder before being fed. Juvenile lizards should be fed 2-3 times a day but adults only need to be fed every 2-3 days.



NEW LIZARD CHECKLIST

Here's a list of the essentials you'll need for your new Lizard. Please ask any of the Best Friends team to help you with your selections.

Essential equipment

- Enclosure with suitable heating and lighting including UV light.
- Substrate material for enclosure floor.
- Furnishings such as branches and hides.
- Water bowl.

Food

- Source of food items such as crickets, cockroaches, beetles, fruit and vegetables.
- Calcium and multivitamin powder.

Caring for your Lizard



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Selecting a Lizard

There are many different species of lizard that can be purchased as pets. Before deciding on what one to select it is important to do your research. Species vary in their size and temperament. Importantly they differ greatly in the environmental conditions they need - some live in the desert while others come from the tropical rainforests of northern Australia. It is vital to know about your lizard's species requirements before taking your new pet home.

Licence Requirements

By law all Australian lizards are protected and as such a licence is required to buy and keep many species as pets. Information regarding licence types, species allowed to be kept and licence fees can be obtained from the Department of Sustainability and Environment by calling **136 186** or at www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Handling

Most lizard species, particularly Dragons and Skinks, can become very used to handling. Other species, such as Monitors, do not like being handled and can bite. It should be remembered though that all lizards can move very quickly when stressed and can easily escape one's grip.

Lizards should have their entire bodies supported when being picked up and never squeeze them. Never just grab them by the tail and lift them. This can cause serious and permanent damage to their spines. Some species can also drop their tails if handled in this manner. Over-handling can cause undue stress and can lead to illness.

We recommend that an adult assist any children when handling lizards and try and remain seated so should they be dropped they don't fall as far as if you were standing.

Housing

Lizards are normally kept in indoor glass-fronted, timber enclosures called terrariums. The size of the enclosure will vary depending on the species and size of the snake. An enclosure 1 metre long x 0.5 metre wide x 0.5 metre high will be suitable for most lizards. They must be well ventilated and can contain furnishings such as hides, branches and rocks. Fresh water must be provided and the humidity in the tank should be monitored. The floor of the enclosure should be covered with a substrate that is easily cleaned. Newspaper or recycled-paper cat litter are ideal.

Lizards can be kept individually or in multiples but this varies considerably with species. Fighting can be a problem. The Best Friends team can advise you on the suitability of housing multiple animals together.

An extremely important part of housing lizards is providing them with heat. A temperature gradient needs to be created in the enclosure by placing a thermostatically-controlled guarded heat source such as a hot basking light or ceramic heater at one end. Thermometers should be used to monitor this gradient. Each species of lizard has its own preferred temperature range. Avoid the use of heat rocks as these can cause serious burns. Our in-store team can advise on what the best temperature range for your particular lizard is.

The provision of UV light for up to 12 hours a day is vital for the health of your lizard. Without access to UV light they can develop a potentially fatal condition called Metabolic Bone Disease. There is no substitute to natural unfiltered sunlight and lizards should be placed in sunlight for 20-30 minutes every 2 to 3 days. UV lights should be changed every 6 to 9 months.



Health

It can be difficult to tell if your lizard is sick or not. For this reason it is important to keep accurate records of items such as body weight and when your lizard has shed, ate and toileted. This allows for patterns to be established because lizards can get sick slowly and often the symptoms are not noticed until too late. The Our Vet team recommend twice yearly checkups.

Common disease problems include respiratory infections, skin disease, fight wounds, internal parasites and reproductive problems.

Reptiles and Salmonella

Most, if not all, reptiles carry the bacteria, Salmonella in their intestinal tract and pass this in their faeces. While it usually does not cause disease in the reptile it can cause serious illness in people. Infection can be easily prevented by ensuring you wash your hands after handling your lizard and equipment and using good, common sense hygiene practices.

Responsible pet ownership

In most areas of Australia you are required by law to register your pets. In some cases there are restrictions on the number and types of pets you are allowed to keep. Check with your local government for further information on your rights and responsibilities both to your lizard and to your neighbours.

Further Information

An excellent reference book is Keeping and Breeding Australian Lizards edited by Mike Swan. It is available at www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au.