



A fascinating, mini dinosaur.

Jackson's chameleons are one of the most readily available chameleons in the pet trade, having been bred in captivity since the 1980's. Of course, this comes at no surprise given their cretaceous appearance. Who wouldn't want a triceratops as a pet? If you're willing to put in the time and effort for their care, the Jackson's chameleon is a great choice for intermediate to advanced hobbyists.

Lifespan

Jackson's chameleons have an average lifespan of 4 to 8 years, depending on gender. Males typically live longer than females.

Size

The most commonly found of the three types of Jackson's chameleons is the Yellow-crested Jackson's chameleon (*C.j. xantholophus*), which is the largest of the 3 available species (*C.j. jacksonii* & *C.j. merumonta*). Hatchlings are 3-4" in size and reach sexual maturity at 5 to 8 months of age. Jackson's chameleons are sexually dimorphic; males are larger at 8-12" in length and develop the signature triceratops look with 3 horns on their head. Females are smaller than males at 7-8" in length and lack the horned appearance.

Natural History

Jackson's chameleons are endemic to Africa, but more specifically *C.j. xantholophus* is native to parts of East Africa, but also introduced to Hawaii, Florida, and California. Despite popular belief, chameleons do not instantly change color to match any background they are placed in front of. They do however change color to reflect how they are feeling, to absorb and reflect radiant heat, and to blend in with their environment using disruptive coloration. Jackson's chameleons are also live bearing or viviparous lizards, which means eggs mature and hatch internally and are birthed live instead of deposited and hatched later.

Housing

Enclosure size depends on the age and sex of your chameleon. Baby chameleons do best in smaller enclosures to ensure ease in thermoregulation and the ability to find food. When it comes to adult Jackson's however, height is especially important for this arboreal species. A semi-screened enclosure **minimum** of a 24"W x 24"L x 36"H is recommended for the entire life of a Jackson's chameleon. As with all species of chameleon, house Jackson's chameleons separately if caring for more than one chameleon.

Lighting & Heating

To properly thermoregulate, reptiles must be provided with a healthy temperature gradient as is appropriate for each species. For Jackson's chameleons, these diurnal, arboreal lizards enjoy consistent temperatures and high humidity.

Provide your Jackson's with a basking temperature of 85-90F at the top of your enclosure. Properly position a vine or a branch a safe distance from the light. Keep in mind that as young Jackson's grow, the vine or branch that was once a safe distance from their basking bulb may need to be adjusted later. The ambient daytime temperature should remain around 80F, and never fall below 60F at night. Humidity should remain between 50-80%. The use of white incandescent basking bulbs for the day are perfect for generating appropriate basking temperatures. Supplemental heat can be provided with the use of CHEs (ceramic heat emitters). Measure temperatures and

humidity closely with digital thermometers/hygrometers at both warm and cool ends of the enclosure; in this case, the top and bottom of your chameleon's enclosure. Measure basking temperatures with a temperature gun or a digital thermometer with a probe.

Jackson's chameleons need ultraviolet light, but not too much. UVB is essential in the absorption and metabolism of calcium and D3. Additionally, exposure to appropriate wavelengths of UV can provide a day/night cycle for your lizard and display your pet in its best colors. Providing modest UVA/UVB is a necessity and not just a recommendation.

Substrates & Cage Décor



Chameleons are arboreal, tree dwelling lizards and as such require plenty of branches and plants to climb on. Sandblasted manzanita, wooden dowels, and artificial vines work well for providing your chameleon with climbing opportunities. Most artificial plants as well as live plants provide visual barriers and may boost humidity levels in the enclosure.

Decor can be attached to the enclosure using suction cups or magnetic potting ledges (for walls made of glass) or floral/jewelry wire, zip ties, or Dragon Ledges (for walls made of screen). Be creative, but safe! There are many ways to decorate your chameleon's habitat.

With rare exceptions, chameleons will not drink from a water bowl and as such require a different approach for staying hydrated than terrestrial species. You should expect to mist their enclosure 3-4 times a day with a hand sprayer or pressurized pump sprayer as one option. The use of a dripper can provide your chameleon with a running supply of water to drink from as well. Automation provides the best option for keeping your chameleon hydrated, not to mention making your chameleon's care easier. A quality automatic rain system, while more expensive, can provide humidity spikes and hydration throughout the day. It is important to note that the enclosure should not remain continuously wet, so expect dry periods in between misting. Additionally, proper drainage is a must. To prevent pooled water from building up at the bottom of your chameleon's enclosure, some opt to use a drip pan for water collection, which is dumped regularly.

Diet & Nutrition

Chameleons are insectivores, meaning they'll thrive off of a diet of appropriately sized and gutloaded crickets, dubia roaches, mealworms, black soldier larvae, etc. Superworms and hornworms can be offered as a treat. Provide younger chameleons with two opportunities a day to eat whatever they'll consume within 10 minutes with food items no larger than the space between their eyes. Older chameleons may be offered food 4-5 times a week.

Supplementation ingredients and formulations vary greatly, and there are differing opinions on what works best. Generally speaking, a quality calcium w/D3 and multivitamin for use with every feeding is recommended. Simply dust insects by placing them and dusting powder into a plastic bag or deep tin and shake gently to coat insects with the powder. Food may be offered in an insect escape proof cup, dropped into the enclosure, or tong fed.

Handling & Temperament

As a standard, do not handle your chameleon until it has settled into its new home – this may take several weeks. Jackson's are typically easier to handle for beginner level chameleons, although not all chameleons tolerate handling as well as others. It is recommended to handle your chameleon as often as it is comfortable with. A chameleon will show it is stressed by turning black, hissing, puffing up, turning to bite, or refusing to eat. If you are concerned about whether your chameleon enjoys handling or not, assume that it does not, and allow it to be a beautiful animal to display in your home.