



A colorful, charismatic lizard.

In the last 15 years, the panther chameleon has grown in popularity due to its bright colors, unique behaviors, and dazzling personality. Today, with the success of captive breeding efforts, chameleons are available now more than ever. Their captive born hardiness and calm dispositions make them ideal beginner chameleons for intermediate reptile keepers, making them a first great option for those interested in keeping chameleons.

Lifespan

Panther chameleons have an average lifespan of 6 to 7 years.

Size

Hatchlings are dime sized and reach sexual maturity at 5 to 8 months of age. Panther chameleons are sexually dimorphic; males are considerably larger at 15 to 20 inches in length and develop the brightest and most intense coloration of the species. Females are smaller than males at 8 to 10 inches in length with softer, cooler hues.

Natural History

Panther chameleons are endemic to Madagascar, and their color can determine what locale they originated from (Nosy Be, Ambanja, Ambilobe, Sambava, etc). Despite popular belief, panther 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.

Housing

Enclosure size depends on the age and sex of your panther chameleon. Baby chameleons do best in smaller enclosures to ensure ease in thermoregulation and the ability to find food. When it comes to adult panthers however, bigger is better, and height is especially important for this arboreal species. A semi-screened enclosure minimum of a 24"x24"x36" is recommended for the entire life of a female panther, but a male will need something larger with an enclosure minimum of 24"x24"x48".

Lighting & Heating

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

Provide your panther chameleon with a basking temperature of 90-95F 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 panthers 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 75F, and never fall below 70F at night. Humidity should remain between 50-75%. 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.

Panther 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 pet parents 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. 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. Panthers 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.