My crested gecko care notes

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These are my working notes on how I keep my crested geckos: what goes in their enclosures, what they eat, and what I check and how often. It's how I do it, and why. It isn't the only way to do it.

I'm sharing my way so other keepers can see that you don't have to follow every guide's recommendations to the letter. You have to find what works for you, your program and your geckos. So these notes open with the textbook version, a classic fact sheet, and then I show you how I actually do it.

If your gecko came from me, this is the setup it grew up in.

Keeping crested geckos since 2024

Dusty

Contents

Crested gecko fact sheet 3
Housing and food, by the book 4
How I keep them 5
My substrate recipe 8
My clean-up crew 10
Plants 11
Substrate changes and upkeep 12
Temperature, humidity and misting 13
Feeding 15
Growth and weights 16
Handling and settling in 17
Sheds and tails 19
Quarantine and cohousing 20
A week in my gecko room 21
Mistakes I've made 22
My shopping list 23
Breeding season 24
When I'd worry 25

Crested gecko fact sheet

The animal

Scientific name	Correlophus ciliatus
Origin	New Caledonia. Thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1994.
Adult size	7 to 9 inches (18 to 23 cm)
Lifespan	15 to 20 years
Activity	Nocturnal and arboreal: it climbs, so it needs height
Temperament	Very docile. May jump when handled, but tolerates regular handling well.
Tail	Doesn't grow back if it's dropped

Climate

Daytime	72 to 78°F (22 to 26°C)
Night	65 to 70°F (18 to 21°C)
Basking spot	None. Room temperature is enough.
Heating	Usually none in most homes. A fan or AC if it climbs past 82°F.
Humidity	50 to 70%. Mist once or twice a day, and let it dry out between mistings.
UVB	Not required. Low-level UVB (2 to 5%) is optional and good for health and color.
Light cycle	12 to 14 hours on, 10 to 12 hours off

Handling and health

Handling	Gently, 2 to 3 times a week for 10 to 15 minutes, over a soft surface
Common problems	Metabolic bone disease, floppy tail syndrome (from calcium deficiency), stuck shed, prolapse, and respiratory infections from the wrong humidity or temperature

Housing and food, by the book

Housing

Enclosure	Vertical glass or screen, with good ventilation
Hatchling, 0 to 3 months	6 qt shoebox tub, at least
Juvenile, 3 to 12 months	12 x 12 x 18 in vertical, at least
Adult, 12 months and up	18 x 18 x 24 in vertical, or larger
Substrate	Coconut fiber, moss or bioactive, moist but not waterlogged. Paper towels for quarantine or juveniles.
Cover	Cork bark, branches, and live or artificial plants to climb and hide in
Housing together	Males should not be housed together

Food and water

Diet	Omnivore. Commercial crested gecko diet (CGD) as the staple.
Extras	Crickets or dubia roaches 1 to 2 times a week, and the occasional fruit treat
Juveniles	CGD nightly, insects 2 to 3 times a week
Adults	CGD every other night, insects once a week
Supplements	None on CGD alone. Dust insects with calcium with D3 every other feeding.
Water	A shallow dish, changed daily. Most drinking is from misted droplets.

Source: the **ReptiDex crested gecko species guide (https://reptidex.com/species-guides/crested-gecko)**, read October 29, 2026

That's the textbook version. The rest of these notes is how I actually keep mine. Where my numbers differ from the sheet, mine are the ones I use.

now, how I do it

How I keep them

Every gecko here lives in a bioactive enclosure from the day it hatches. They are housed individually, except for short stretches during breeding season.

My journey started with a bioactive enclosure, and it's what I enjoy most. I get joy out of recreating natural environments and giving my animals something beautiful and practical. It has worked for me, too. I can regulate humidity better, my geckos tend to be less shy and better to handle, and they regulate themselves more naturally. If they're hot, they cool off on moist substrate. If they're cool, they climb higher in their plants, into the light. If they need help with a shed, they work themselves into a patch of moist moss. And they always have the clean-up crew and the odd escaped feeder to snack on between diet meals.

Done right, a bioactive enclosure maintains and cleans itself. It needs a substrate refresh and some plant maintenance a few times a year, and the glass cleaned as needed.

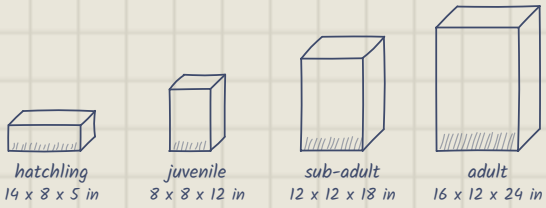
Moving up

- Hatchlings: a 6 qt shoebox tub with bioactive substrate, artificial vines, a pool noodle hide and small branches to climb. It keeps them secure, and I only clutter the back half, so they can always find food and water.
- Around 8 to 10 g: a 5 gallon aquarium conversion, or similar.
- Around 15 g: a 10 gallon aquarium conversion, or similar.
- Around 25 g: their adult enclosure, a 20 gallon tall aquarium conversion.

Juveniles and up get fully planted enclosures.

20+ geckos at any given time

Enclosure size by age



Stage	Enclosure (W x D x H)	Moves up at
Hatchling	14 x 8 x 5 in	Around 8 to 10 g
Juvenile	8 x 8 x 12 in	Around 15 g
Sub-adult	12 x 12 x 18 in	Around 25 g
Adult	16 x 12 x 24 in	From around 25 g

I've tried the Exo Terra 18 x 18 x 24 and 20 gallon long conversions too, and I've landed on the 20 gallon talls as my standard, because they've given me the best results for my geckos' comfort. A 20 tall is narrower, but it still has a good amount of depth and height for climbing, jumping and exploring, and I put care into every setup so there are plenty of places to perch, leap, hide and climb. They're smaller than the industry standard, but my geckos still get quality enrichment and enjoy their habitats.

I learn each gecko's habits: the plants it likes, its favorite places to hide, its nightly routine. Then I tailor its enclosure to suit it.

I keep an eye out for stress, so each gecko ends up in the setup it's most comfortable in. That means knowing Fireball loves a tall vertical cork bark, Red Velvet loves her rubber tree, and Sully sleeps in a different plant every day.

For hides, I use cork bark rounds.

cork bark round

I've tried a lot of enclosures by now. The popular drawers didn't work for me: my geckos weren't as active, and I couldn't see them well enough to know how they were doing without disturbing them. Exo Terra and similar glass enclosures are really nice, but impractical at a large scale. I've landed on aquarium conversions because they give me fine-grained control over the environment.

Every enclosure gets fans, automatic misting and a humidity monitor, to hold the right gradient and humidity cycle. I paint three sides black, so a gecko never has the stress of seeing its neighbors. I've had geckos fixate on a neighbor and attack the glass, even through privacy film.

My substrate recipe

The layers, top to bottom

oak leaf litter

soil mix with activated charcoal

LECA clay pebbles

The mix

- 40% organic, fertilizer-free topsoil
- 20% coconut coir or coco fiber
- 20% orchid bark, for aeration and drainage
- 10% play sand
- 10% horticultural or activated charcoal

I mix chunks of activated charcoal into the soil.

Add-ins: a handful of sphagnum moss, plus worm castings and oyster shell to keep the clean-up crew healthy. A layer of leaf litter goes on top.

How deep

- Hatchling tubs: enough to cover the bottom
- 5 gallon: around 2 inches
- 10 gallon: around 3 to 4 inches
- 20 gallon: around 4 to 5 inches

Drainage layer

My drainage layer is LECA clay pebbles.

It's 1 to 2 inches of LECA, depending on the enclosure. Hatchling tubs don't get a drainage layer.

I don't put a barrier between the LECA and the soil. I used to use weed cloth, but I never saw much benefit. A barrier could help you find a laying female's eggs more readily, but I watch mine often enough that I generally know when and where they're laying.

My leaf litter is oak, because I have oak trees in my yard. I sanitize the leaves by baking them at 200 degrees for 45 minutes to an hour, and I never use rotten leaves or leaves with extra inhabitants.

oak leaves

Why this mix? I've tried an abundance of DIY recipes, especially since I also keep plants. Mixes heavy on coco coir or fiber dry out extremely fast, some are too chunky for laying females, and others are too dense. This one tends to land right in between, and my clean-up crew and plants thrive in it too, so it's a win-win.

My clean-up crew

I breed my own feeder insects and clean-up crew.

isopod, from above

springtail

trumpet snail

Who's in it

I'm honestly not picky. I cultivated my own colony of wild-caught common isopods (Armadillidium vulgare) from my home in South Texas, quarantined for several generations before they went into any enclosure. I also keep colonies of dairy cows, powder mixes and dwarfs.

I tend to pair the Armadillidium with one of the other species: the Armadillidium are better at not getting eaten, while my geckos get a nice meal out of the softer varieties.

Trumpet snails are my secret weapon: they keep the enclosure walls clean.

I culture them in totes with the same substrate and add-ins as the enclosures, plenty of sphagnum moss, and a good rotation of fresh veggies and isopod food. I split colonies every six months or so, to keep growth steady and make sure I don't run out when I'm restocking enclosures.

A new enclosure starts with a generous colony of springtails and 10 to 15 isopods, and they generally grow well from there. When an enclosure starts to smell more than usual, I add more springtails and 5 or so more isopods to build the population back up.

Plants

My go-to bioactive plants: pothos, philodendrons, snake plants, money trees, rubber trees, syngoniums and various ferns.

pothos and snake plant

bromeliad

rubber tree

- Syngoniums and pothos thrive in all of my enclosures, and so do smaller, younger philodendrons. They hold up really well to climbing, and a lot of my geckos sleep in the leaves.
- Rubber trees are a favorite with many of my geckos: the leaves are the perfect shape and size for the bigger ones to sleep in. They're more finicky, though. A new rubber tree generally drops a lot of leaves before it's established, and after that it typically does well.
- Money trees are a good addition and usually hardier than rubber trees, but they suit geckos that like climbing more than sleeping on leaves.
- Snake plants are also a hit: sturdy, and a great place to hide and sleep.
- Bromeliads are a bioactive staple, and the varieties that hold water make sure there's always a drink available.
- Ferns: I honestly don't know their names, but I do know foxtail fern is the worst. It's pretty, but don't use it: it isn't suited to the environment and always dies.

I buy from trusted nurseries, then rinse each plant really well and inspect it closely for hitchhikers. I had a slug outbreak once, and it was miserable, so now I pay even closer attention. I won't risk the safety of my geckos or the clean-up crew with pesticides. The closest thing to one I use is Mosquito Bits for gnats, as needed.

Every enclosure has Barrina T5 grow lights. They work well for the plants, and my geckos love to sleep in the plants right under the lights to get their dose of sunshine.

Substrate changes and upkeep

In two years, I've only completely changed the substrate for two reasons: a couple of enclosures had slugs, and I moved. Every few months I'll fluff it up if it's getting compacted from watering and nutrient drain. Other than that, the clean-up crew and plants keep it fresh.

What I check

I don't have a set routine, apart from weigh-ins every week or every other week, depending on my schedule. I check in nearly every day and night, mostly because I like watching them and seeing what quirky things they're up to.

- Every day: their food, and fresh drinking water for everyone
- Every day: temps and humidity, out of habit
- Stools, to make sure everyone is eating well
- Anything strange in their behavior

All of my geckos are quirky, and many are creatures of habit. Red Velvet has slept on her rubber tree every day for months, so if she weren't on it, I'd check a little closer for an issue.

I clean the glass with chlorhexidine disinfectant, the blue one, diluted with water. I've used diluted vinegar before too, but I feel the chlorhexidine is a better guard against disease, so it's my preference.

When mold shows up, I add more springtails and isopods. It's their job, and they love it. I've never had a serious mold outbreak, so this is for minor things, like spilled gecko diet that molded over in a day or so. The goal is a realistic environment: it isn't going to be a petri dish.

Temperature, humidity and misting

I don't fixate on an exact number anymore. Things change in nature, so I'm okay if temps drop or run slightly higher, or if the humidity fluctuates. My enclosures tend to hold a pretty consistent cycle on their own.

Temperature

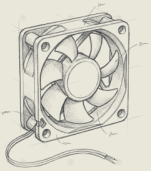
I try to keep them around the mid 70s. This is Texas, though, so it fluctuates: it can get down to 65 when winter sneaks up, and up to 78 when the AC struggles in summer.

Humidity and misting

I spray them really well every other day, which brings humidity to around 80%. The light and temperature cycles then create a natural humidity cycle, and by the next spray, humidity is around 55 to 60% across the board.

Enclosures from 5 gallons up are on a MistKing system, scheduled for every other evening. I spray the hatchling tubs by hand with an automatic garden sprayer.

The large enclosures have 40mm computer fans on the back, working as exhaust fans.



40mm fan

Every fan plugs into a USB power bank. I used to wire them all together in a chain, but that was a pain when moving enclosures. With the USB bank, each fan unplugs on its own.

Smart plugs schedule the lights and fans. The lights come on an hour after sunrise and go off an hour before sunset, to give the geckos time to adjust to the transition naturally. The fans run in the morning, from 6 to 9.

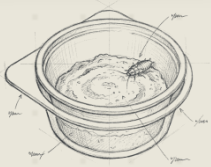
The hatchling tubs come with air holes in the back, and I add ventilation to the front too, so air can travel through.

Feeding

Diet

I used to feed Pangea, but I switched to Repashy because the Pangea started molding daily. My geckos have always preferred the taste of the Zoo Med diets, though, so sometimes I mix the two.

Fresh diet goes out every other day, and comes out the next day.



diet cup

dubia

Insects

Right now I breed only dubia. I used to do crickets, but they're noisy and stinky. My only struggle is that I go through dubia faster than they can reproduce. Dubia are also good at hiding in a bioactive enclosure, which isn't ideal, so I serve them in the same feeding cups as the diet, where they stay contained.

My hatchlings always have isopods. They make the best intro to bugs, since they're small and the powder and dairy cow varieties are soft. I start offering small dubia at around 2 to 3 months, once they're eating diet consistently.

I'm not exact with the number of bugs, but my general rule of thumb is 2 to 3 for babies, 5 or so for juveniles and 6 to 8 for adults.

Growth and weights

Every pairing, weight and outcome logged in ReptiDex. Each gecko's page here shows its weight log as a growth chart and a table, so you can see how yours grew before it came home. See every gecko.

I weigh every Sunday or every other Sunday, on a regular kitchen scale.

weigh-in

I expect to see a steady trend up. If a gecko trends down for two or more weigh-ins, I know something is wrong, and it needs a closer look. I've never had a gecko starve itself, so I put a weight issue down to stress or illness, and stress can generally be eased with changes to the environment.

I probably keep my geckos longer than most. Around 10 g is when I start deciding who I want to sell. By then I have a better idea of sex, the morphs are clearer, and I've learned each personality, so I can help a buyer pick the right gecko for them.

Handling and settling in

I don't handle my geckos unless I need to: only for weigh-ins and moving enclosures. I only take pictures at a weigh-in every few months, because even my most tolerant geckos don't want to be handled.

crested gecko

The first weeks home

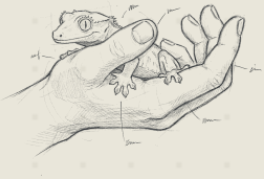
Have the enclosure ready, and a plan for food, substrate and water. A lot of this is learn-as-you-go: you can do all the research in the world and find it doesn't work in practice. That's why I'm not a stickler about having everything running weeks in advance. If you know the right enclosure size, diet and environment, I believe you're ready to properly care for your gecko.

I try not to bother a new gecko for 2 to 4 weeks while it settles, and I think this is very important. I offer food right away, and I don't panic if it isn't eating. Like I said, I've never had a gecko starve itself. They eat when they're ready.

Normal is hard to define, because every gecko is an individual. I've had geckos take a full month before they looked relaxed and were eating reliably. After around 4 weeks, if I'm still seeing a lot of hiding or very little movement, I start changing the environment to give the gecko what it prefers: more cork bark, more foliage, more horizontal or more vertical space. Sometimes it takes trial and error, but there's a big difference once a gecko is comfortable.

Arrival day: Pick your gecko up within 2 hours of FedEx's arrival notice. If anything looks wrong, tell me right away and send a photo or video.

When I do handle a gecko, I try to keep an open, flat hand, so I look less threatening. Imagine being a gecko with an alligator-shaped predator grabbing at you. I've also found that a firm but gentle tube around the gecko with your hand helps calm a wild one, something like the squeeze chute for cattle.



a calm hand

Geckos also have a stress lick. I wrote about **reading the tongue flick** ↗ on Breed Ledger.

Sheds and tails

When a gecko needs help with a shed, it works itself into a patch of moist moss. That's one of the reasons I keep them bioactive: the humidity cycle and the moss do most of the work.

A stuck shed on the toes or the tail tip is the one I watch for, because it can cut off blood flow. If it's still there after the next misting, it goes on the list in When I'd worry.

Crested geckos don't regrow a dropped tail. A gecko that drops its tail lives a normal life without it. It's one more reason I keep handling to weigh-ins and moves, and keep it gentle.

Quarantine and cohousing

They are housed individually, except for short stretches during breeding season. I've seen how a gecko can fixate on a neighbor through the glass, which is why three sides of every enclosure are painted black. If you want two geckos, I'd tell you to set up two enclosures.

Anything new stays apart before it joins the rest. My wild-caught isopods were quarantined for several generations before any went into an enclosure. A gecko from someone else gets its own simple setup, away from my collection, until I'm happy it's eating, pooping and gaining.

A week in my gecko room

The routine

- Every day and night: a check-in, food and fresh water, temps and humidity
- Every morning: fans on from 6 to 9
- Lights: on an hour after sunrise, off an hour before sunset
- Every other day: fresh diet out, and out again the next day
- Every other evening: the MistKing runs, and the hatchling tubs get sprayed by hand
- Sunday, or every other Sunday: weigh-ins
- Every few months: fluff up compacted substrate, trim the plants
- Every six months or so: split the isopod colonies

Mistakes I've made

- Drawers. My geckos weren't as active, and I couldn't see them without disturbing them.
- Privacy film. Geckos still fixated on their neighbors through it. Now I paint three sides black.
- Slugs that came in on a plant. I cleaned everything out of the enclosure, washed it well with gentle soap and water, let it dry in the sun, and restarted it fresh. Now I inspect every plant closely.
- Coco-heavy substrate. It dried out extremely fast.
- Weed cloth over the LECA. I never saw much benefit, so I stopped using it.
- Foxtail fern. Pretty, and it always dies.
- Daisy-chained fan wiring. A pain whenever I moved an enclosure. Now each fan has its own USB port.
- Pangea, once it started molding daily. I switched to Repashy.
- Crickets. Noisy and stinky. Now I breed dubia.

My shopping list

What I rely on

- Barrina T5 grow lights
- A MistKing misting system, and an automatic garden sprayer for the tubs
- Repashy crested gecko diet, sometimes mixed with Zoo Med
- 40mm computer fans, a USB power bank and smart plugs
- Humidity monitors
- A regular kitchen scale
- LECA, topsoil, coco coir, orchid bark, play sand and charcoal
- Sphagnum moss, worm castings and oyster shell
- Cork bark rounds
- Mosquito Bits, for gnats
- Chlorhexidine disinfectant, for the glass

Breeding season

They are housed individually, except for short stretches during breeding season.

A laying female needs a substrate she can dig in. That's part of why my mix isn't too chunky. I watch mine often enough that I generally know when and where they're laying, so I don't need a barrier over the LECA to find the eggs.

When I'd worry

I'm not a vet, and this page isn't vet advice. It's what makes me look closer, and what I've read from reptile vets about when to stop watching and book an appointment.

I look closer

- Weight trending down for two or more weigh-ins
- Hiding or barely moving after the first month home
- Unusual droppings, or none
- Stuck shed on the toes or tail tip
- Less active, or less interested in exploring, than that gecko usually is

A vet, soon

- Kinks in the spine or limbs, a soft jaw, or trouble climbing: possible metabolic bone disease
- Sudden weight loss, or signs of dehydration like wrinkled skin and sticky saliva
- Stuck shed that won't come off
- Open-mouth breathing, wheezing or gasping
- Anything protruding from the vent, or an injury from a fall

If you're not sure whether it's an emergency, call a vet and ask. Find a reptile vet before you need one: **the ARAV Find a Vet directory ↗** lists reptile and amphibian vets, and it's worth calling ahead to make sure a clinic sees crested geckos. These signs follow **one exotics clinic's crested gecko guide ↗**.

Every buyer gets support by text, email or phone, with no time limit, so ask me before you worry alone: use the question form, or write to me at info@geckistry.com.