

## Viper geckos Care Sheet

Viper geckos are one of the neatest geckos out there due to their size and behavior. If you are considering raising vipers there are a few things you need to know to get started. In the pages that follow, I hope to provide the basic information you need to maintain a healthy pet viper gecko.

Additional

### I. **If You Have Not Made The Purchase Yet....**

Viper geckos have a few requirements you should know about before purchasing them as a pet.

Your new pet will require heat to their enclosure. They also feed on live foods and need to be provided a constant supply to grow. They are not one of the most easily handled reptiles due to their small size. Any time dedicated to handling should be limited to a few minutes per day and should exclude small children. When you are ready to purchase your first viper gecko, look for a healthy animal. Large, fat tails and perky disposition (not constantly sleeping) are two things to look for. If you are purchasing on-line, ask specific questions. Your experience and the animal's will be more enjoyable if you start with a healthy gecko. Finally, you should be prepared to care for your gecko before purchasing the animal. The best way to do that is to continue reading.

### II. **Did you know this about viper geckos?**

- Viper geckos (*Teratolepis fasciata*) live in dry, rocky areas in Pakistan.
- They are nocturnal, sleeping during the day in rock crevices and coming out at night to eat.
- Viper geckos are terrestrial. They wander around on the ground, crawling on rocks. They do not climb the glass of an aquarium (except as juveniles) and they do not jump.
- Vipers only grow to 3 inches (full length) and can live up to 10 years!
- If roughly handled by the tail, the vipers gecko may drop them. This is a defensive behavior, where a bird or even larger lizard get a tail for a meal and the viper gets to live another day.
- Male viper geckos are very intolerant of other males. 2 males should never be housed together.

### III. **Enclosures, What Do I Keep Them In?**

Due to their size, viper geckos can be kept in very small enclosures. A 5 gallon aquarium setup will work for one animal. A 10 gallon tank can easily hold a male and several females. The best container I've found is a custom built 15 gallon aquarium that is only about 7 inches tall. A screen top is required as viper gecko babies can climb glass! I've found adults either cannot climb glass or prefer not to. Another inexpensive option is to use a plastic sweater boxes with holes drilled in the top. These are used primarily by those breeding large

numbers of viper geckos. If you are using a glass enclosure, select a permanent place away from the sun as they can heat up very quickly.

#### IV. **Heating and Lighting**

**Lighting** is usually required to view your new pet. However, viper geckos do not require the same high UVB lighting other lizards do such as bearded dragons and chameleons. This is because they are nocturnal. A standard florescent is sufficient to light the enclosure and allow for viewing. A timer to control turning the light on and off is very useful. A "red" light can be used if you wish to enjoy your reptile's night time activity.

**Heating** the viper's enclosure comes in many forms. The most important information to remember is their requirement for a temperature gradient in their enclosure. They should have access to cooler spots (80 degrees F) and warmer spots in the day (up to 90 degrees F). In nature, they may come out to soak up some sun but generally sleep all day and become active at night. Night time temperatures can be allowed to drop to the mid 70 degrees. Heating the "warm" side of the enclosure can be accomplished using an incandescent light bulb, heat lamp, or heating pad (specifically designed for lizards). The incandescent light must be sized appropriately so it doesn't over or under heat the enclosure. Heat lamps can be a bit more difficult to use. The "Under The Tank" heating pads work well as they are designed specifically for the reptile enclosure. Another option that is offered is called Heat Rocks. These can be very dangerous for your vipers as the gecko may come into direct contact with high temperatures emitted from these rocks.

#### V. **Bottoms Up!**

As important as other elements of your gecko's enclosure is the substrate they will spend all their time on. There are many options such as desert sand, a reptile product called coco fibers, and even paper towels and a bare bottom setup.

A decision you must make is how much maintenance you anticipate putting into the gecko enclosure. Vipers will defecate throughout the enclosure. This will need to be cleaned up at least once every week. Slate, tile, or a bare bottom tank can be mopped over with a wet paper towel. A paper towel can be replaced. Feces can be removed from the sand. While the most aesthetic of substrates, some viper gecko owners have moved away from sand over concerns of the gecko taking in sand when they feed and it causing problems with the gecko's digestive system. If you consider using sand are of minimal benefit, below), Finally, not mentioned in the above list are products such as orchid bark that, when ingested, can cause severe impaction problem with your gecko.

#### VI. **Other Furnishing**

##### **Hides**

Your viper gecko needs a place to hide in the daytime. Several 'containers' can function for viper hides such as half flower pots, half coconut shells, or half plastic cups. A humid hide/lay box can also be included. Most often used for hide boxes are plastic sandwich boxes or margarine containers. By cutting a hole in the top or side and filling with a medium that can be moisten, a hiding place can be made. The box can be filled with vermiculite, peat moss, paper towels, or coco fibers. Once filled and moistened, the box should be checked each week for moisture.

##### **Dishes**

One small dish should be provided for water. viper geckos will use this for drinking. The water must be fresh, so replacement should be done every other day or so. The water in the dish should be accessible to the gecko and the dish not so large and deep that they could drown.

Another dish can be provided for food (other than crickets). It can also be used to provided calcium and vitamins.

### **Rocks and Driftwood**

Make sure any rocks or driftwood added to your viper's enclosure is both washed thoroughly and does not contain any sharp edges. Another consideration is that when adding the new furnishings, they are in place and cannot topple onto your new pet.