

Yemen / Veiled Chameleon

The Veiled, or Yemen Chameleon (*Chamaeleo calyptratus*) is native to the western coasts of Yemen and southwestern coast of Saudi Arabia. The male Veiled is green in colour and, depending on mood, this green will range from a bright lime green to a reddish olive drab. The green base colour is marked with stripes and spots of yellow, brown, and blue. Non-breeding females and juvenile chameleons are generally a uniform green colour with some white markings. Breeding and gravid females are a very dark green with blue and yellow spots. The prominence of these markings is dependent on several factors including health, mood, and temperature of the lizard. Aside from the colour differences, adult male veiled chameleons are larger than the females. It is possible for them to reach an overall length of 24 inches (60 cm), but most specimens usually reach between 14 to 18 inches (35–45 cm). Females are smaller with the average overall length being just less than 12 inches (30 cm). Males and females both have a decorative growth called a "casque" on their heads. The casque of a male chameleon is much taller than the female's. Males also have a spur on each hind leg that the females do not have. This spur is present on males from hatching, and can grow larger with maturity. Like most chameleons, veiled chameleons are specialized tree dwellers. They have a flattened body meant to mimic a leaf and feet specially designed for grasping limbs and branches. They have a prehensile tail that acts as a fifth appendage and aids in climbing. Their eyes work independently of one another allowing the chameleon to look in front of and behind itself at the same time. They have a long sticky tongue that they use to capture their insect prey. Veiled chameleons are ambush predators and are capable of lying still for very long periods of time waiting for unsuspecting bugs to wander by. The lifespan of a veiled chameleon may be up to five years for females and up to eight years for males.

Housing

Veiled Chameleons are best housed separately, and should only be put together for short amounts of time for breeding purposes. They grow very fast, and can reach adult size in as little as 4 months. All glass vivariums should be avoided, as they do not provide the right ventilation required. Ideally a mesh enclosure should be used, the most popular being the exo-terra mesh Flexarium. However wooden vivariums can be used, providing there is adequate ventilation. An arboreal enclosure should be used, as chameleons love to climb. The ideal Flexarium for an adult Veiled is the 72x42x76 cm (30x16x30 inch) enclosure, however if you have the space for a larger enclosure this would be better. If using a wooden vivarium then it should be at least 3x2x3 foot (90x60x90 inches). Ideal substrates should encourage humidity, such as a soil type or coconut fibre (such as Eco-Earth) however, newspaper and kitchen towel can be used. You should never use wood chippings or orchid bark as a substrate for your Veiled Chameleon.

Veiled chameleons need a moderate humidity level (around 50 percent). Misting the plants twice daily will help with humidity levels, and a drip or misting system is also recommended. Chameleons rarely drink from a water bowl, but they will lap up droplets of water off plants, so the misting/drip system also serves as a water source. Position a drip system so the water droplets cascade over the plants in the enclosure. Invest in a hygrometer to measure humidity.

Heating and Lighting

The ideal temperature for your Veiled Chameleon is a temperature gradient of 80-90F (26-32C) with a basking spot of 95F (32C). Temperature gradients are important, to allow the veiled to move from warm and cold accordingly. Veiled Chameleons can take a large night time drop of up to 15F (10C), so as most people's homes do not drop below 65-70 F (18-21 C) at night, heating at night is not necessary. Heat should be provided from above – in form of a heat bulb – and not from below, with a heat mat. The best way to do this is with a circular light reflector, or ceramic heat element, any of which should be placed outside of the cage to prevent burns, however if using a wooden vivarium make sure to cover the heat source with a light guard or cage. The heat bulb MUST be plugged into a thermostat, the most popular on the market being either the Habistat Dimming thermostat, or the Habistat Pulse thermostat. By not providing this basic requirement, you would be subjecting your chameleon to unregulated temperatures, and the enclosure may become too hot, causing dehydration and potentially death.

Veiled Chameleons are Diurnal (active during the daytime rather than at night) therefore you need to provide UV light. This should be of at least 8%, although personally I use either the 10.0 or 12% variety. Again this should be placed outside the enclosure, if however you have chosen a wooden vivarium it needs to be out of reach for your chameleon. You should also purchase a light reflector, as this will ultimately concentrate all the UVA and UVB rays inwards, rather than everywhere.

All heating and lighting should be on for at least a 12-hour cycle; many people like to increase this to 14 hours during the summer.

Décor

Veiled Chameleons should be provided with lots of branches and vines for climbing, as well as foliage for camouflage. Any décor should be secured, as adult Veiled's can be heavy. Branches and vines should be of different thickness and textures, and dowels designed for bird cages should be avoided, as these do not give your Veiled's feet any exercise. Both plastic and live plants can be used in the enclosure. Please remember when using live plants that they are not harmful or toxic to the chameleon. Live prey will feast on plants in the vivarium, being eaten by the chameleon and passing any harmful toxins to your veiled. Ficus trees have often been used in chameleon housing, but require some caution, as the sap can be irritating. Other plants you could try include pothos, hibiscus, and dracaena.

Feeding

Veiled Chameleons are omnivorous, meaning they eat both live prey as well as vegetation. Veiled's tend more towards insectivorous though, and will readily eat Locusts appropriate to the size of your Chameleon. Other live prey you can offer include Crickets, Fruit Flies and roaches, although Locusts will remain a firm favourite, as they often climb towards the top of the enclosure, making them easier to catch. Other live foods you can offer include mealworms, wax worms and silk worms, but these will need to be hand feed (or with tweezers if you are squeamish) and should be given as a treat only.

In addition, many veiled chameleons will also eat a bit of plant matter (including live plants in the cage, so it is vital that only non toxic plants are used). You can offer small amounts of vegetables

and fruits such as dandelion leaves, collard greens, kale, diced zucchini, butternut squash, red pepper, blueberries, thin slices of apple or pear, etc.

Dusting and Gut Loading

You should always gut load your live food before offering them to your Chameleon; otherwise you are basically feeding them an empty shell. You can either buy 'gut load' from the Internet and pet shops and place this in with the prey, or dust some veg with calcium and place this in with the prey. Leave for between 12-24 hours, to make sure all the prey have eaten some of the veg. By feeding the 'food' you also increase how long they live for saving you money in the long run.

Dusting the live food is a **MUST!** They will not get all their calcium and vitamins from their live food and UV lighting alone. Dust with vitamins every other feed (alternate between pure calcium and a multi-vitamin