WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

# Crested Gecko

*CGD, temperature limits, humidity cycles and the tail that won't grow back*

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***New owner?*** *Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.*

*Crested geckos were declared extinct in 1914 and stayed missing from the scientific record for eighty years. Then a tropical cyclone in 1994 brought a French expedition to southern New Caledonia, and the lizard the world had written off was sitting on a branch in the forest, blinking slowly, completely unbothered. It is now one of the most captive-bred reptiles in America — and for genuinely good reasons. Crested geckos tolerate normal room temperatures in most air-conditioned American homes, eat a commercially prepared diet that takes nutritional guesswork entirely off the table, handle well with patience, and forgive the kind of minor husbandry wobbles that would knock a more demanding species sideways. For a family that wants a reptile that is interesting, long-lived, and manageable, few choices are better.*

Two things belong up front before the guide starts. First: **crested geckos cannot safely tolerate temperatures above 85°F.** Heat stress above that threshold is a genuine emergency and can be fatal in hours. In most air-conditioned American homes this stays a theoretical ceiling, but knowing it matters — a summer power outage or a sunny windowsill can create the problem in under an afternoon. Second: **if your crested gecko drops its tail, that tail does not grow back.** Unlike leopard geckos, crested geckos have no tail-regeneration mechanism. A permanently stub-tailed gecko is called a "frogbutt" in the hobby, is otherwise completely healthy, and is loved unreservedly — but knowing the rule before your first handling session prevents a genuinely sad surprise. Both facts come up throughout this guide because both actually matter.

SECTION 1

# Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Set up the entire enclosure before your gecko arrives.** A minimum **18" × 18" × 24" tall footprint** — taller is always better because crested geckos are arboreal and live vertically. Front-opening doors are strongly preferred over top-opening lids; reaching down from above mimics predator behavior and stresses a gecko who hasn't settled in yet.
2. **Confirm your room temperature before any animal goes in.** The target daytime ambient is **72–78°F**. You do not need a heat lamp in most American homes as long as the room stays in that range. What you do need to know is the ceiling: **above 85°F is dangerous.** A simple digital thermometer in the room tells you whether you have a problem before the gecko arrives.
3. **Check that the room never dips below 65°F.** Brief nighttime dips into the mid-60s are fine — they mirror highland New Caledonia at night — but sustained temperatures below 65°F call for a low-wattage ceramic heat emitter (CHE) wired to a thermostat, set to maintain a minimum of 68°F. Do not use a heat lamp; the visible light disrupts their nocturnal rhythm and their habitat does not include a basking spot.
4. **Mount a low-output UVB lamp before the gecko arrives.** A Ferguson zone 1 source — a UVI of 0.5 to 1.0, equivalent to dappled forest shade — is now recommended by most reptile veterinarians and behaviorists. A 5.0 or 6% T5 HO fluorescent tube at the manufacturer's recommended distance, running on a 12-hour photoperiod, is the correct setup. Crested geckos were kept without UVB for decades, but current evidence shows measurably improved bone density and behavior with it.
5. **Install a calibrated digital hygrometer.** Humidity should sit at **60–80%** and follow a daily wet-dry cycle: mist the enclosure in the evening, allow it to dry slightly but not completely by morning. A probe-style hygrometer placed mid-enclosure gives you a reliable reading. A digital combo thermometer-hygrometer unit on the lower-middle wall works well for crested gecko setups.
6. **Add cork bark, branches, and live or artificial plants before the gecko goes in.** The enclosure should feel dense from the gecko's point of view — vertical cork tubes at two or three levels, diagonal branches spanning the mid-enclosure, and enough plant coverage that the gecko is never visible from all angles at once. A gecko who can always be spotted from outside the enclosure cannot truly feel hidden, and a gecko who cannot feel hidden is a stressed gecko.
7. **Place hides at multiple height levels.** A low-level ground hide, a mid-level sheltered ledge or cork tube, and an upper hide near the ventilation panel cover the gecko's full range of movement. Crested geckos change resting height based on

temperature and time of night.

8. **Mix the first cup of Crested Gecko Diet (CGD) before the gecko arrives.** CGD is a commercially prepared powdered meal replacement that is genuinely nutritionally complete for this species. Mix one part powder to roughly two parts water until it reaches a smooth applesauce consistency — exact ratios vary slightly by brand; follow the package. Place the cup on a magnetic ledge or cork surface at lower-to-mid enclosure level, accessible from a branch.
9. **Add a shallow water dish at the lower level.** Most crested geckos drink water droplets from leaves after misting, but a standing dish is still worth providing as a reliable backup water source. Refresh it daily.
10. **Place the gecko in her enclosure and leave her completely alone for five to seven days.** No handling, no rearranging furniture, no tapping the glass to see if she moves. A gecko who arrived stressed — and every new gecko is stressed — needs to locate all of her hides, establish her vertical territory, and learn that the large things outside the glass are not threats. Check food, water, and temperature quietly once a day. Offer a fresh CGD cup on day two. If she hasn't touched it by day five, this is completely normal.
11. **Find your exotic animal vet before you need one.** Not every clinic is comfortable with small arboreal geckos. Call ahead, confirm they see reptiles and specifically small gecko species, and tape the number to the side of the enclosure. A crested gecko who looks vaguely off today can be in serious trouble by the day after tomorrow.

## First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

### Essentials

- **A tall glass or PVC enclosure with the correct footprint** — 18" × 18" × 24" is the minimum for one adult, and 18" × 18" × 36" is genuinely better. Front-opening doors are important; crested geckos are arboreal and a top-opening enclosure requires reaching down on them, which triggers a defensive startle response in an unsettled gecko. Screen or ventilated mesh on the top and front-lower panels maintains airflow without drying the enclosure too quickly.
- **A digital thermometer and hygrometer** — a combination unit with a probe and a remote display handles both. You need temperature readings at mid-enclosure and humidity readings through the wet-dry cycle, not just a strip thermometer stuck to the glass.
- **A Ferguson zone 1 UVB fluorescent tube on a timer** — a 5.0 or 6% T5 HO lamp at the correct distance from the enclosure manufacturer's guidelines, running 12 hours on and 12 off. Replace bulbs every 12 months; UV output drops before the bulb visibly dims.
- **A ceramic heat emitter (CHE) wired to an on/off thermostat** — only necessary if your room dips below 65°F overnight or in winter. The thermostat probe goes at mid-enclosure, the CHE is set to maintain a minimum floor temperature of 68°F. If your room holds 72–78°F year-round without assistance, this stays in the supply cabinet as a backup.
- **A quality misting bottle or automated misting system** — evening misting is how you deliver the wet-dry humidity cycle that mimics New Caledonia's highland rainforest. A manual fine-mist bottle works; an automated misting head on a timer is more consistent if your schedule varies.
- **Cork bark tubes and cork rounds at multiple sizes** — the primary structural furniture. Cork provides grip, holds humidity well, has natural antibacterial properties, and looks correct in a tropical forest setup. Full tubes at the lower and upper level double as hides; flat rounds give resting surfaces.
- **Live or artificial tropical plants** — pothos, bromeliads, and ficus are the most common live choices; they tolerate the humidity cycle, provide real leaf surface for drinking from, and don't mind low-light conditions. High-quality artificial equivalents work if live plants aren't practical — the gecko can't tell the difference and both provide the visual coverage that reduces stress.

- **Coconut fiber substrate or a bioactive soil mix** — coco fiber holds humidity well and is easy to replace; a bioactive soil mix with a clean-up crew is the preferred long-term setup for an established adult. Paper towel is appropriate for new arrivals in quarantine.
- **A commercial Crested Gecko Diet** — the powdered meal replacement that is this species' primary nutritional source. Available in multiple flavor formulas; buy a couple of small varieties to find what your gecko prefers. Keep a sealed container and mix fresh every 1–2 days; do not pre-mix a large batch.
- **Feeder insects** — dubia roaches, crickets, or black soldier fly larvae (BSFL) for the 1–2 weekly enrichment feedings. Source from a reputable feeder supplier, never wild-caught. You don't need a large colony to start; a small standing order once a week is enough.
- **Calcium with D3 supplement** — a fine dusting powder for feeder insects, used on a light schedule. CGD already contains calcium and D3, so over-supplementing insects is the real risk here; dust lightly and follow the schedule in the Diet section.
- **A small open dish of plain calcium carbonate** — placed in the enclosure at a lower-level accessible surface. Allows the gecko to self-supplement between meals.

> ***Ready to set up?*** *Browse the essentials in our collections: Reptile and Amphibian Enclosures and Reptile and Amphibian Terrarium Supplies & Accessories.*

### Enrichment

- **Live or silk-leaf hanging plants at multiple levels** — visual density throughout the vertical space, with enough coverage that the gecko has a concealed resting spot at every height tier. Pothos cuttings root easily in the humid substrate and grow quickly into a functional living cover layer.
- **Diagonal and horizontal branches or bamboo perches** — spanning the mid-enclosure, angled at various degrees, sized so the gecko can comfortably grip with her toe pads. Natural wood branches should be baked at low heat to eliminate parasites before use; commercial reptile branches and bamboo are pre-treated.
- **A magnetic feeding ledge** — allows the CGD cup to be placed at mid-to-upper height where crested geckos prefer to feed, rather than on the ground. Easy to remove, clean, and reposition.
- **An additional humid hide or sphagnum moss box** — a covered shelter packed with damp sphagnum moss, placed at the lower or mid level. Essential during pre-shed periods when the gecko needs concentrated high humidity for clean shedding.
- **A shallow feeder cup or gecko feeding tray** — for offering live insects without them escaping into the substrate or burrowing out of reach. Makes monitoring how many insects are eaten much easier.
- **A sturdy travel carrier or small temporary enclosure** — for vet trips or temporary housing during deep cleans. Size it so the gecko fits comfortably with a single hide inside; minimal furniture reduces anxiety in an already-stressed transport situation.

> ***Enrichment, one click away.*** *Shop Reptile and Amphibian Accessories.*

SECTION 2

# Meet Your Crested Gecko

Wild crested geckos (*Correlophus ciliatus*, formerly *Rhacodactylus ciliatus*) inhabit the humid mountain forests and forest-edge scrub of southern New Caledonia — a French island territory roughly 750 miles east of Australia, in the South Pacific. Their native habitat is a layered tropical forest with a closed canopy, high ambient humidity, frequent rainfall, and nighttime temperatures that drop notably from the daytime high. They live almost entirely in the vertical dimension: foraging, sheltering, and mating among branches and leaf litter three to ten feet off the ground, rarely descending to the forest floor for anything other than egg-laying.

The species was collected and described in 1866, then went unrecorded in the wild for 128 years. A Category 4 cyclone struck New Caledonia in 1994 and the international scientific survey that followed rediscovered the gecko — and several other thought-extinct species — in the southern province. The first captive breeding programs were established by the mid-1990s, and the crested gecko is now one of the most prolifically bred reptiles in the American hobby, with a gene-pool diversity and captive husbandry knowledge base that makes acquiring a healthy, well-adjusted animal genuinely straightforward.

| Trait | Detail |
|---|---|
| Common name | Crested gecko, eyelash gecko |
| Scientific name | *Correlophus ciliatus* |
| Native range | Southern New Caledonia; Île des Pins and surrounding islets |
| Wild habitat | Humid mountain forest, forest-edge scrub, riparian vegetation |
| Adult length | 6–10 inches total (snout to tail tip); 4–6 inches snout-to-vent |
| Adult weight | 35–65 g; females typically 35–55 g, males 40–65 g |
| Typical lifespan | **15–20 years** with good care; well-documented in captivity |
| Activity pattern | Nocturnal — active from dusk through the early morning hours |
| Social structure | **Strictly solitary** — one animal per enclosure; males fight; females stress each other |
| Temperament | Calm and handleable with time; initially flighty and defensive |
| Unique trait | Parietal eye on the crown detects light changes; setae on toe pads allow glass-climbing |

## Origin and what it means for husbandry

New Caledonia's southern highlands sit at elevation — their cool, wet, seasonally variable climate is why crested geckos thrive at normal room temperature rather than requiring a tropical heat source. In the wild, daytime temperatures typically range from the low to mid-70s°F and nights drop into the mid-60s. The gecko's biology is calibrated to that band. Temperatures above 85°F push the animal outside its evolutionary experience entirely, and unlike lizards from tropical lowland habitats, it has no behavioral adaptation for dealing with high heat. The ceiling is real and it's not negotiable.

## The parietal eye

If you look at the top of a crested gecko's head, you'll find a small, slightly scaled-over spot between and slightly behind the eyes — this is the **parietal eye**, also called the third eye. It cannot form images. It registers light and dark and is thought to help regulate circadian rhythms and the photoperiod response. It is not a wound, not a disease symptom, and not anything to worry about. Every crested gecko has one.

## The tail, handled honestly

The tail-drop fact gets soft-pedaled in some care guides and it shouldn't be. Crested gecko autotomy — the voluntary release of the tail under stress — is a well-evolved anti-predator mechanism. Unlike leopard geckos, and unlike many other gecko species, *Correlophus ciliatus* does not regenerate the tail after autotomy. The stump heals cleanly, the gecko remains completely healthy, and stub-tailed individuals are functionally identical to tailed ones in every husbandry and behavioral respect. But the original tail is gone for good. This matters for three practical reasons: first, never grab or restrain by the tail during handling. Second, if a tail drop does occur, document when it happened and monitor the stump site for infection. Third, if you acquire a stub-tailed gecko from a rescue or breeder, you're getting a perfectly good animal — the frogbutt nickname is affectionate, not pejorative.

## What surprises new owners

The CGD revelation surprises most people. This is a species that eats a powdered commercial diet as its complete primary nutrition, not as a supplement to insects or vegetables. A well-formulated CGD provides protein, fat, carbohydrates, calcium, D3, and micronutrients in balanced ratios. Insects are enrichment and behavioral variety, not the cornerstone of the diet. Owners coming from insectivore reptile experience sometimes feel like they're cutting corners by not relying on insects — they're not. The CGD is the nutritional anchor, and the insect feeders are the bonus.

The heat sensitivity surprises people who keep their homes warm in summer. A room that reaches 86°F on a hot August afternoon is a room that can kill a crested gecko. Air conditioning is not optional for this species in most American climates; it's a basic husbandry requirement from June through September.

The lifespan figure also resets expectations. Fifteen to twenty years is the realistic outcome for a crested gecko with a correct setup, not a theoretical ceiling. That's a commitment comparable to adopting a cat. Breed accordingly.

SECTION 3

# Enclosure Setup & Layout

## Height over footprint: the arboreal rule

Crested geckos live vertically. In the wild they occupy a band between roughly three and ten feet above ground, resting on branches and plant stems during the day and foraging actively through the vertical space at night. A wide, low enclosure — the terrestrial format that works well for leopard geckos — is the wrong format for this species. The vertical dimension is where a crested gecko does nearly everything: hides, sleeps, hunts, drinks, thermoregulates, and interacts with its environment.

The minimum enclosure for one adult is **18" × 18" × 24" (width × depth × height)**. A 24" or 36" height option in the same footprint is better, and no crested gecko was ever harmed by having too much vertical space. A 20-gallon tall aquarium is a marginal alternative but falls short in floor footprint and ventilation flexibility; a purpose-built reptile enclosure with front-opening doors and front- or top-panel ventilation is the practical standard for this species.

## Building the vertical layout

Think of the enclosure in three altitude bands, roughly eight inches each in a 24" tall setup, and fill each band deliberately.

**Lower zone (ground to 8"):** Substrate layer — coco fiber, bioactive mix, or paper towel — at a minimum depth of two to three inches for moisture retention. A ground-level cork tube or half-log for the rare occasion the gecko descends. A shallow water dish here, anchored so it can't tip. A small open calcium dish on a flat surface near the water dish.

**Middle zone (8"–16"):** The primary activity and feeding area. A diagonal or near-horizontal branch spanning the full width, or a pair of them at slightly different heights, gives the gecko her main transit corridor. A cork tube with a large enough opening to enter and turn around serves as the primary daytime hide. The magnetic CGD feeding ledge goes here — mid-height is where most crested geckos prefer to feed. Dense plant coverage from this level upward creates the visual privacy that a gecko needs to feel secure.

**Upper zone (16"–24"+):** The nighttime activity ceiling. A second cork tube or covered shelf at upper height gives the gecko a high resting option. Upper-level plant coverage — pothos draped along the back and sides is ideal — makes this zone feel like a canopy rather than an empty top. The UVB lamp sits above the mesh lid and illuminates this zone down into the middle; the gecko will choose her UV exposure by resting at different heights.

## Ventilation and the wet-dry cycle

Screen or mesh panel ventilation — at the top and at one front lower panel — is the standard for most crested gecko enclosures. Full cross-ventilation from top to bottom front dries the enclosure too quickly for the humidity cycle to work; full-screen tops with partial front ventilation let you mist in the evening and have the enclosure drop back to 50–60% ambient humidity by mid-morning. The right balance depends on your room's ambient humidity and season; adjust misting frequency accordingly rather than fighting the enclosure's natural drying rate.

A fully closed glass enclosure holds humidity too well, allows CO■ to accumulate, and is prone to bacterial growth in the substrate. Adequate ventilation is not optional — it's the mechanism that creates the wet-dry cycle that the gecko's respiratory and skin health depend on.

## Live plants in the layout

Live plants are not just aesthetic in a crested gecko enclosure — they are functional husbandry. Leaf surfaces hold water droplets after misting, and crested geckos drink primarily by licking those droplets rather than drinking from still water. Dense plant coverage provides genuine concealment. Root systems in a bioactive substrate contribute to the moisture buffer that smooths out the humidity cycle.

Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*) is the standard for a reason: it's non-toxic to geckos, tolerates low light and high humidity, grows aggressively enough to fill an enclosure quickly, and is essentially impossible to kill accidentally. Bromeliads add visual interest and collect water in their cups. Ficus and philodendron work well. Before adding any live plant, research its toxicity for reptiles; the list of genuinely safe species is long, but it is not universal.

SECTION 4

# Substrate Guide

The substrate question in crested gecko husbandry is simpler than in some reptile species because CGD reduces loose-substrate ingestion risk — a gecko eating from a cup rather than hunting insects from the ground is less likely to accidentally swallow substrate. But the choice still matters for humidity retention, bacterial control, and long-term enclosure health.

| Substrate | Best for | Performance | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Coconut fiber (coco fiber), loose or compressed | Adults, established setups, quarantine step-up | Excellent moisture retention; non-toxic; fine texture; holds the wet-dry cycle well; minimal dust when damp | Dry coco fiber can become dusty; keep it slightly moist at all times; replace every 3–4 months or at first sign of bacterial smell |
| Bioactive soil mix (coco fiber + organic topsoil + leaf litter, with live clean-up crew) | Healthy adults in naturalistic setups | Best long-term substrate; stable humidity; self-cleaning with isopods and springtails; supports live plant roots; genuinely mimics forest floor | Requires more setup investment; clean-up crew must be established before the gecko goes in; not suitable for quarantine or newly acquired animals |
| Sphagnum or sheet moss over coco fiber | Any adult setup; excellent in a moss box | Provides natural surface texture; holds concentrated moisture in a defined zone; supports hide and shed humidity | Surface layer; use in combination with coco fiber below, not as the sole substrate; replace when it begins to smell |
| Paper towel or non-adhesive shelf liner | Quarantine, new arrivals, sick animals, juveniles under 3 months | Zero impaction risk; easy to inspect droppings; replaceable daily; sterile starting point | Not appropriate for long-term use; no humidity-retention benefit; replace at every soiling |
| Organic topsoil (no added fertilizers or perlite) | Bioactive layer component | Good plant root support; adds beneficial microbial activity | Use as a layer in a bioactive mix, not as a solo substrate; verify no pesticides or synthetic additives |
| Cypress mulch | Supplementary surface layer only | Holds humidity reasonably well; natural appearance | Avoid bark pieces large enough to be ingested; not suitable as a solo substrate; some batches carry mold — inspect before use |
| Calci-sand or vitamin-infused loose sand | **Avoid outright** | **Impaction risk** if ingested; poor moisture retention; compacts and becomes anaerobic when damp | Does not safely supplement calcium despite marketing |
| Fine play sand or beach sand | **Avoid outright** | Impaction risk; extremely poor humidity retention; compacts; no bacterial diversity | No appropriate use case for a high-humidity arboreal species |
| Bare glass or tile | **Avoid for permanent use** | Impossible to maintain humidity cycle; no grip; psychologically sterile | May be used as a short-term hospital floor with paper towel over it; not a substitute substrate |
| Cedar or aromatic pine shavings | **Never** | Aromatic volatile oils toxic to all reptiles | No safe use case for any reptile |

**The practical recommendation for most keepers:** coco fiber for the first 60 to 90 days while you learn the animal's behavior and confirm the enclosure's humidity dynamics, then upgrade to a bioactive mix once you have an established routine. A

sphagnum moss box placed inside the enclosure handles the humid-hide function regardless of which substrate you choose.

SECTION 5

# Temperature, UVB & Humidity — The 3 Numbers

Crested gecko husbandry is often summarized as "they just live at room temperature" — and in many American homes, that is approximately true. But the precision within that summary matters. The window is narrower at the top than most people expect, and the humidity cycle is specific enough to be worth understanding before you buy a misting bottle.

| Parameter | Target value | How to measure it | What goes wrong when it's off |
|---|---|---|---|
| Daytime ambient temperature | 72–78°F | Digital thermometer probe at mid-enclosure | Below 68°F: reduced activity, slower digestion, immune suppression; above 80°F: chronic stress begins; above 85°F: heat stress emergency |
| Nighttime temperature | 65–72°F | Same probe overnight | Brief dips to 63°F are tolerable; consistent temps below 62°F require a thermostatted CHE; sustained temps above 74°F at night disrupt the day-night cycle |
| Absolute maximum — never exceed | **85°F** | Digital thermometer or infrared gun at warmest point in the enclosure | Heat stress above 85°F is acute and potentially fatal; onset is faster in small geckos; cool the room, not the gecko directly |
| UVB (Ferguson zone 1) | UVI 0.5–1.0 | Solarmeter 6.5R at the basking zone, or follow manufacturer distance tables for the specific bulb | Too low or absent: reduced calcium metabolism efficiency, behavioral flatness, mild MBD risk over time; too high: eye irritation, UV overexposure (unusual at zone 1 levels) |
| Ambient enclosure humidity | 60–80% | Digital hygrometer at mid-enclosure, away from the water dish | Below 50% consistently: dysecdysis (stuck shed), dehydration; above 85% without adequate ventilation: respiratory infection risk, bacterial substrate growth |
| Post-misting humidity | 80–90%, dropping through the day | Same hygrometer; observe the arc over 8–12 hours | If humidity doesn't drop below 80% by mid-morning, ventilation is insufficient; if it drops below 50% by afternoon, increase misting frequency |

## The wet-dry cycle: what it is and why it works

Crested geckos evolved in a mountain rainforest where nightly dew, rainfall, and fog push humidity up each evening, and the daytime sun and breeze draw it back down. The wet-dry cycle you create in the enclosure mimics that rhythm. **Mist the enclosure in the evening** — a thorough misting that leaves visible droplets on leaves and glass, raises the hygrometer above 80%, and provides fresh drinking water on leaf surfaces. **Allow the enclosure to dry through the morning and afternoon** — not to desert dryness, but back down to the 60–70% range by mid-afternoon. This cycling prevents the constant saturation that breeds respiratory infection, while ensuring the gecko has access to drinking droplets every evening and maintains good skin and respiratory health.

The cycle also directly supports clean shedding. A gecko who experiences regular humidity cycles sheds in one smooth motion; one who lives in perpetually low humidity develops stuck shed, particularly on the toes.

## No basking spot, no heat lamp

The crested gecko setup has no hot end and no cool end in the way a thermal-gradient reptile setup does. There is no basking tile, no heat lamp, and no surface temperature to calibrate. The ambient room temperature is the temperature — which is why

monitoring the room, not just inside the enclosure, is the relevant habit to build. In summer, this means knowing what your room's peak daytime temperature is on a hot day with the windows open and the AC not running. If the answer is "potentially above 85°F," you need an air conditioner running before July, not a contingency plan afterward.

If your room runs genuinely cold in winter — below 65°F at night — a **ceramic heat emitter** (CHE) wired to a quality **on/off thermostat** with the probe at mid-enclosure is the correct solution. Set the thermostat to 68°F and the CHE provides just enough warmth to hold the floor without disrupting the day-night cycle. A CHE emits no visible light, which matters for a nocturnal animal.

SECTION 6

# Diet & Nutrition

*Crested gecko diet powder mixed with water is the foundation. Live insects add enrichment and protein variety twice a week.*

Crested gecko nutrition is one of the most genuinely interesting topics in reptile husbandry, largely because the species broke the conventional reptile diet model. Most lizards require a careful calibration of whole prey or vegetables, calcium dusting, gut-loading protocols, and micronutrient supplementation. Crested geckos have, since the mid-1990s, been sustained and bred across many generations on a single prepared food source — and they've thrived. Understanding why, and how to use it correctly, is the most important nutritional skill you'll develop as a crested gecko keeper.

## Crested Gecko Diet (CGD): what it is and how to use it

**CGD** — Crested Gecko Diet — is a commercially prepared powdered meal replacement specifically formulated for *Correlophus ciliatus* and closely related New Caledonian gecko species. It typically contains a protein base (often dried insect meal and egg protein), fruit components, calcium, vitamin D3, and a micronutrient profile calibrated to the species' actual dietary needs in the wild. When mixed with water and offered regularly, it provides genuinely complete nutrition. This is not a supplement. It is not a partial diet to be filled in by other foods. It is the primary food source, and it works.

**How to mix:** combine one part CGD powder with approximately two parts water — different brands specify slightly different ratios; follow the package. Mix until smooth and lump-free, roughly the consistency of thin applesauce or a milkshake. The mixture should run slowly off a spoon but not be watery.

**How to offer:** place the mixed CGD in a small food-safe cup or on a magnetic ledge cup at mid-to-upper enclosure height. Crested geckos prefer to feed from an elevated position and will often ignore a cup placed on the ground. **Remove and replace the cup every 24 hours** — CGD ferments quickly at enclosure temperatures, and a gecko eating fermented CGD risks digestive upset. Mix a fresh cup every one to two days; on the off day, a clean empty cup or no cup at all is fine.

**What if she ignores the cup?** Crested gecko appetite is variable, and many individuals eat primarily at night when you're not watching. A cup that looks untouched in the morning has often been fed from between midnight and 3 AM. The practical check is whether the cup level has dropped over the 24-hour period, not whether you observed eating. CGD color and flavor preferences vary between individuals — if a gecko consistently ignores one formula, try a different flavor.

## Insects: enrichment, not staples

Live insects are a genuine nutritional addition for crested geckos, providing varied protein sources, behavioral enrichment from the act of hunting, and micronutrients that diversify the diet. But they are secondary to CGD, not its equal partner. A gecko who eats only CGD and no insects is nutritionally complete. A gecko who eats only insects and no CGD is missing significant nutritional coverage.

**Feeding frequency:** 1–2 times per week. Offer a small number of appropriately sized insects in the enclosure in the evening, not as a replacement for the CGD cup.

| Feeder | Category | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Dubia roaches | **Good enrichment staple** | Excellent protein-to-fat ratio, easy to source, size-flexible; the most reliable insect choice for occasional crested gecko feedings |
| Black soldier fly larvae (BSFL, phoenix worms) | **Good enrichment staple** | Naturally high in calcium; soft body; excellent for variety; move slowly enough for the gecko to catch easily |
| Crickets | **Good enrichment staple** | High protein; widely available; require careful gut-loading; remove any uneaten crickets within 30 minutes — crickets will bite a resting gecko |
| Hornworms | **Occasional treat** | Very high moisture; soft-bodied; excellent hydration bonus; buy small — they grow quickly and become oversized |
| Silkworms | **Occasional treat** | Good nutrition; very soft; pricier but excellent when available |
| Waxworms | **Rarely — recovery use only** | Extremely high fat; highly palatable; a gecko who gets them regularly may begin refusing CGD entirely. Reserve for coaxing an underweight animal to feed |
| Mealworms | **Avoid as a regular feeder** | High chitin, moderate impaction risk if CGD cup is unavailable, lower nutritional density; occasional offering in rotation is fine but should not be a primary insect source |
| Wild-caught insects | **Never** | Pesticide, herbicide, and parasite contamination risk; the same species from a reputable supplier is always safer |
| Any fruit, vegetables, or plant matter from your kitchen | **Never for supp lementation** | CGD already contains a formulated fruit component in correct ratios. Fresh fruit from your kitchen has disproportionate simple sugars and the wrong calcium-to-phosphorus ratio; it does not add what it seems to add and disrupts the nutritional balance CGD provides |

## Prey sizing rule

No feeder insect should be wider than the space between the gecko's eyes. This is especially important for juveniles, who are at greater impaction and choking risk from oversized prey.

## The supplement schedule — less is more

This is where crested gecko husbandry diverges most clearly from other reptile diets. Because CGD already supplies calcium, D3, and most micronutrients, the supplementation load on insect feeders is minimal — and over-supplementing is a real risk. A gecko who gets heavily dusted insects on top of a CGD-rich diet can accumulate excess D3 and calcium to unhealthy levels.

| Supplement | When | Why |
|---|---|---|
| Plain calcium carbonate (no D3) in a small open dish | Always available in the enclosure | Allows self-supplementation between meals; the gecko will lick it when she needs it |
| Calcium with D3, light dusting on insects | Every other insect feeding, approximately once per week | CGD covers most D3 needs; the insect dusting is a light insurance, not a primary delivery mechanism |
| Reptile multivitamin | Once every two weeks, on an insect feeding | Micronutrient insurance; not a priority given CGD's coverage, but not harmful at low frequency |

**Do not dust insects at every feeding.** If a gecko is eating CGD consistently and insects twice a week, lightly dusting one of those insect feedings per week with calcium and D3 is sufficient. Scaling back from what you'd use for a pure insectivore is correct, not lazy.

## Gut-loading insects

Even at a frequency of twice per week, gut-loading the insects before offering them meaningfully improves their nutritional value. Feed insects leafy greens (mustard greens, collard greens, dandelion greens), squash, sweet potato, and a quality dry gut-load mix for 24–48 hours before feeding. Avoid spinach and beet greens as a large fraction of the load — their high oxalate content binds calcium. Change fresh gut-load items daily.

## Hydration

Crested geckos drink primarily from water droplets on leaves and glass after misting — this is their natural behavior in a dew- and rain-heavy forest environment. The shallow water dish is a backup source, not the primary one, but it should always be present, clean, and refilled daily. Many geckos also drink from the CGD itself, which has significant moisture content when mixed correctly. Watch for sudden changes in the rate of water dish use; increased drinking can be an early indicator of dehydration or illness.

> ***Shop the food and supplies:*** *Browse Reptile & Amphibian Food and Live Feed Delivered!.*

SECTION 7

# Shedding

A healthy adult crested gecko sheds roughly **every three to six weeks**, with juveniles shedding more frequently — sometimes every two to three weeks — during active growth phases. The pre-shed signs are similar to those in other gecko species: the skin becomes visibly dull, slightly grayish, and the colors mute before a shed. The gecko may become less active and reduce feeding for a day or two. This is normal; do not offer insects to a pre-shed gecko, and don't be alarmed if the CGD cup is untouched.

## Crested geckos eat their shed

If you never see shed skin in the enclosure, you haven't missed anything — crested geckos consume their own shed as it comes off, almost always in the early morning hours, and they eat it quickly and completely. This is entirely normal, healthy behavior, not a sign of calcium deficiency. The shed skin contains residual protein and minerals that the gecko reabsorbs. If you find intact shed skin in the enclosure, it almost certainly means the shed didn't go completely smoothly. Inspect the gecko.

## The humid hide during shed

The humidity cycle does most of the work for clean sheds in crested geckos. A gecko living in a correctly misted enclosure with access to a damp moss box during pre-shed will almost always shed cleanly without any intervention. The moss box — a covered container with damp sphagnum moss inside, sized so the gecko can fit comfortably — placed at mid-enclosure level gives the gecko a concentrated-humidity refuge during the one to two days when she's actively releasing her old skin. Check and re-moisten the moss in the box every two to three days; it dries faster than a substrate layer.

## Dysecdysis — stuck shed

**Dysecdysis** (dis-EK-di-sis) is incomplete or stuck shed — a husbandry signal, not a disease in itself. The most common cause is a humidity deficit, usually because the misting cycle was missed for several days or the moss box dried out. The most vulnerable site is the toes.

**Stuck shed on toes** is the crested gecko's most common shedding complication. Old shed builds up around each toe in layers; the constriction eventually cuts off circulation and, if uncorrected over multiple shed cycles, the toe dies. A crested gecko missing toe tips almost always lost them to retained shed that was never addressed.

**What to do:** prepare a shallow container with lukewarm water just deep enough to cover the gecko's feet and belly. Allow her to soak for 10 to 15 minutes. After soaking, the retained shed on the toes usually loosens enough to slide off with very gentle pressure from a dampened cotton swab or your fingertip. Check every toe individually. Recheck in good light the following day. If the shed doesn't release in two soak sessions, or if a toe appears swollen or discolored beyond the fresh pink of normal healing, see a vet. Do not pull dry, un-soaked shed; it is bonded to the new skin layer beneath it and tearing it risks exposing raw tissue.

SECTION 8

# Common Challenges & Solutions

Crested geckos are forgiving reptiles, but they have their own specific set of problems, and every keeper should know them before any of them happen.

## Metabolic bone disease (MBD)

**What you see:** softness or deformity of the jaw, trembling limbs during movement, difficulty gripping branches, visible bowing of the legs or spine, muscle twitching, and in advanced cases spontaneous fractures or an inability to hold body posture normally. **Why:** a calcium or D3 deficiency — most commonly from a keeper relying entirely on insects without using CGD, or from offering CGD inconsistently while also not supplementing insects. A gecko on consistent, correctly mixed CGD is at very low MBD risk; a gecko fed primarily on un-supplemented crickets is at genuine risk. **What to do:** reintroduce CGD as the daily primary food; correct the insect supplement schedule; add a plain calcium dish to the enclosure immediately. **When to call a vet:** as soon as you see trembling, soft jaw, or movement difficulty — MBD reverses well if caught early and very poorly if caught late.

## Floppy tail syndrome (FTS)

**What you see:** the tail droops to one side or hangs downward rather than being carried in the natural upward or horizontal position; in more advanced presentations, the tail lies flat and curves noticeably when the gecko is at rest. **Why:** the precise cause is not definitively established, though leading theories include a combination of enclosure positioning (too few horizontal perches forcing the gecko to hang vertically for extended periods), metabolic factors, and possible genetics. A gecko who spends most of its resting time hanging head-up on a vertical wall without horizontal resting surfaces is more likely to develop FTS than one with ample horizontal branches. **What to do:** ensure the enclosure has multiple horizontal and near-horizontal resting surfaces at various heights; minimize bare glass surfaces as the only available perch. Once FTS develops, it may be permanent even with husbandry correction, but it does not appear to cause the animal pain or impair feeding, movement, or breeding. Monitor for secondary injury if the tail interferes with grip. **When to call a vet:** if the tail posture is accompanied by any other neurological signs (circling, head tilt, trembling) or if the gecko appears in distress.

## Tail drop and stump care

**What you see:** the gecko's tail separates during a handling incident, an escape attempt, a fall, a cricket bite, or — rarely — without any obvious trigger. The dropped tail writhes for several seconds and then stops. The stump is typically small, rounded, and does not bleed heavily; the autotomy plane is physiologically prepared for the separation. **Why:** involuntary defensive response triggered by restraint, pain, or extreme fright. The tail does not regenerate. **What to do:** move the gecko to a paper towel substrate for two to three weeks to keep the stump clean and dry. Offer slightly more food than usual — the tail is a fat reservoir, and losing it depletes the animal's reserve. Keep the stump dry during this period; avoid misting that wets the wound site directly. **When to call a vet:** if the stump shows redness, swelling, discharge, or an odor within the first week, or if the gecko shows signs of pain or distress beyond the first hour after the drop.

## Heat stress

**What you see:** a gecko who is unusually lethargic and flat on a surface, breathing with the mouth slightly open, unresponsive to gentle touch, or who is actively trying to escape the enclosure by pressing against the ventilation. In severe cases: loss of coordination, unresponsiveness, or collapse. **Why:** ambient temperature above 85°F. Onset can be rapid in a small gecko — two to three hours in a room that reached 88°F can be enough to cause serious injury. **What to do:** remove the gecko from the hot environment immediately and place her in a cool, shaded location at 72–75°F. Do not immerse in cold water — the goal is gradual cooling. Offer water droplets at the mouth with a damp cotton swab if she is alert enough to lick. **When to call a vet:** any gecko who was in a space above 85°F for more than an hour and is showing symptoms should be seen the same day. Heat damage in

small reptiles can be internal and non-obvious.

## Respiratory infection

**What you see:** audible clicking, popping, or wheezing during breathing; mucus at the nostrils; the gecko breathing with the mouth open while at rest; excessive lethargy; discharge from the mouth. **Why:** bacterial or viral infection, usually triggered by low temperatures combined with high humidity (the enclosure is wet and cold rather than going through a proper wet-dry cycle), inadequate ventilation, or the stress of a recent move or husbandry problem. **What to do:** correct temperature and ventilation immediately; review the misting schedule to ensure the enclosure is cycling properly. **When to call a vet:** within a few days of first respiratory symptoms — respiratory infections in small geckos escalate quickly. A keeper who notices open-mouth breathing and waits a week often has a very sick gecko by appointment day.

## Mites

**What you see:** tiny moving specks — dark or reddish, pinhead-sized — visible on the gecko's skin, around the eye margins, in the skin folds at the wrists and neck, or floating in the water dish. The gecko may rub against surfaces, soak more than usual, or appear generally dull and uncomfortable. **Why:** reptile mites (*Ophionyssus natricis* and others) are common in animals that passed through pet distribution chains or reptile expos, and can transfer between enclosures on hands and clothing. **What to do:** quarantine the gecko immediately from any other reptiles; discard all substrate and non-essential decor; clean the enclosure thoroughly with a reptile-safe disinfectant; soak the gecko gently in lukewarm water to drown surface mites; treat with a reptile-safe mite treatment product according to label directions. **When to call a vet:** for a heavy infestation, a gecko who is visibly debilitated, or a case not responding to over-the-counter treatment. A baseline fecal exam on a new gecko from any source is a worthwhile investment; it catches internal parasites before they become clinical.

## Stuck shed on toes (recurrent)

**What you see:** gray, papery rings around one or more toes that persist after a shed event; toes that look constricted or narrower than the base segment; in chronic cases, toes that have died and been lost. **Why:** consistently low humidity in the enclosure or missed misting cycles, compounded over multiple sheds. **What to do:** see the Shedding section for the soak-and-swab protocol; address the root cause by auditing your humidity cycle. Toes that are constricted but intact can often be saved with soaking and immediate husbandry correction; toes that are already necrotic require a vet visit. **When to call a vet:** any constricted toe that doesn't free up after two soak sessions, or any toe that appears dead.

## CGD refusal and appetite variation

**What you see:** a gecko who was eating reliably from the CGD cup and has stopped — the cup goes untouched for several days; the gecko appears active and alert but shows no interest in food. **Why:** normal appetite variation is common in crested geckos, particularly in autumn and winter, during and after breeding season, and following any enclosure change or husbandry disruption. Males go off food more dramatically than females. Very occasionally, CGD refusal signals a preference problem — the gecko has gotten bored of a single flavor formula and will accept a different one. **What to do:** try a different CGD formula; offer live insects to confirm the gecko is interested in food generally; check temperature (a room that has cooled as autumn begins can slow feeding drive); keep offering fresh cups daily even if they're ignored. Monitor body weight by the feel of the hip bones through the skin — a gecko who is thin at the pelvis or whose eyes appear sunken is losing weight and needs evaluation. **When to call a vet:** if CGD refusal is accompanied by weight loss, lethargy, or other symptoms; or if a gecko refuses all food including insects for more than three to four weeks.

## Egg-binding (dystocia) in females

**What you see:** a visibly swollen lower body in a female gecko, repeated digging without successful egg deposition, restlessness, progressive lethargy, and loss of appetite. Female crested geckos produce eggs whether or not they have been mated — unfertilized eggs, called slugs, are a normal part of a sexually mature female's biology. A female without a lay box has no appropriate site to deposit her eggs and will often become egg-bound. **Why:** absence of a suitable lay site; a malformed egg; or

calcium deficiency affecting the muscular contractions needed to pass eggs. **What to do:** if you keep adult females, provide a **permanent lay box** — a container with damp coco fiber or organic topsoil at a depth of three to four inches, with an entry hole, placed at lower enclosure level. Most females will use it reliably. Warm soaks may assist mild cases. **When to call a vet:** any female who has been actively straining for more than 12 hours without depositing eggs, or who is lethargic and not responsive to the lay box. Dystocia becomes life-threatening quickly.

## Eye problems

**What you see:** a cloudy, swollen, or sunken eye; retained shed over one or both eyes that doesn't clear after the shed event; the gecko pawing at its face or rubbing the eye area against surfaces; discharge from or around the eye. **Why:** retained shed on the eye is the most common cause; in a gecko with a correct humidity cycle it should not occur, but it happens if the cycle is disrupted during a shed. Infections, physical injury from a feeder cricket, and foreign body abrasion also occur. **What to do:** retained eye shed — gentle 10-minute warm soak, then cotton swab contact at the shed margin to attempt release; never attempt to peel eye shed without soaking first. **When to call a vet:** any retained eye shed that does not release after two soak sessions; any obvious swelling, discharge, or asymmetry between the two eyes; any sunken eye. The eye is the structure where a small problem becomes a large one the fastest.

## Quick reference

| What you see | Likely cause | What to do | Vet urgency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Soft jaw, trembling limbs, bowing | MBD — calcium or D3 deficit | Introduce CGD; correct supplement schedule | Within days; sooner if severe |
| Tail drooping to one side, hanging | Floppy tail syndrome | Add horizontal perches; monitor | If neurological signs accompany it |
| Tail separation, wriggling stump | Autotomy — defensive response | Paper towel substrate; dry stump; extra food | If stump shows infection signs |
| Lethargic, flat, open-mouth breathing on hot day | Heat stress above 85°F | Move to cool area immediately; offer water | Same day if symptomatic |
| Clicking, wheezing, nasal discharge | Respiratory infection | Fix temp and ventilation; keep warm and dry | Within a few days |
| Tiny moving dots on skin or in water dish | Mites | Quarantine; discard substrate; treat | Heavy infestation: soon |
| Gray rings on toes, won't release after shed | Stuck shed — humidity deficit | 10-minute warm soak; gentle swab | Constricted toes: within a week |
| CGD untouched for days; otherwise active | Normal appetite variation | Try different formula; offer insects; monitor weight | If weight loss or other symptoms |
| Swollen lower body in female; repeated digging | Egg-binding | Provide lay box immediately; warm soak | Straining >12 hours: same day |
| Cloudy or swollen eye, retained eye shed | Eye shed, injury, infection | Warm soak; cotton swab at margins | Retained after 2 soaks: same week; swelling or discharge: within days |

SECTION 9

# Handling

Crested geckos can become genuinely relaxed in human hands — calm enough to sit in an open palm and investigate a sleeve, or to walk steadily from hand to hand for ten minutes without trying to leave. Getting there takes time and consistency, and the rules of that process matter because this is a species where a single bad handling experience — a grab, a drop, a tail that came off — sets trust back by weeks.

## The hand-walking technique

The technique that works best for crested geckos is called **hand walking**: rather than holding the gecko, you provide a moving surface of hands that she walks across. One hand moves forward as the other falls behind; the gecko walks onto the forward hand, the rear hand moves to the front, and the cycle continues. The gecko always has somewhere to go. She is never restrained. She experiences your hands as a moving landscape rather than a trap.

This is the technique that tames crested geckos faster than any other approach, because the gecko's stress response is triggered by being prevented from moving — not by the proximity of your hand. A gecko who can always leave (but doesn't) is building confidence. A gecko who is gripped firmly is simply learning that your hands are dangerous.

## Building trust in the first four to six weeks

**Days 1–7:** hands off entirely. Let the gecko settle into the enclosure. During evening servicing of food and water, move slowly and avoid sudden gestures at the glass.

**Days 7–14:** begin opening the enclosure door at dusk for a few minutes without reaching in. Let the gecko register your presence without being disrupted. Some geckos will come to investigate the open door on their own within a few sessions — this is a good sign.

**Days 10–18:** introduce your hand into the enclosure, resting flat and still on a lower surface or branch. Don't move toward the gecko. A gecko who approaches and sniffs your hand voluntarily is progressing faster than one who allows herself to be scooped. Wait for the sniff before you offer a scoop.

**Day 14 onward:** a smooth upward scoop from below — cupped hands, fingers together, lifting gently from underneath the body — begins the hand-walking sessions. Start with two to three minutes. Extend as the gecko relaxes, which you'll recognize by slower movement, a loosening posture, and a reduction in the frequency of attempts to jump or flee.

## What not to do

**Never grab the tail.** The tail is an autotomy site. A hand that closes on the tail during a handling session triggers exactly the defensive response the tail-drop mechanism was evolved for. Approach from the side. Scoop from below. Support the full body length.

**Never reach in from above.** Crested geckos are prey animals. A large object descending from above registers as a predator. Front-opening enclosures exist precisely to solve this problem — use them. If your enclosure opens only from the top, lower your arm slowly along the back wall before moving toward the gecko, rather than descending directly.

**Never handle immediately after eating.** Allow at least one to two hours after a visible CGD feeding or insect meal. A stressed gecko who regurgitates loses nutrition and associates handling with that discomfort.

**Read the stress signals.** A crested gecko who is uncomfortable will tell you clearly: she will gape (open the mouth), vocalize with a small bark or chirp, puff the body slightly, wave the tail in a slow lateral arc, flatten against your hand and try to move away repeatedly, or jump unexpectedly. Any of these means the session has run too long. Return the gecko calmly to the enclosure. Don't interpret stress signals as defiance; they are communication. Responding to them consistently is what builds trust,

not what undermines it.

## Children and supervision

Crested geckos are a reasonable choice for families with children who are old enough to understand the tail rule and handle calmly. Mandatory sitting position for young children — on the floor, cross-legged, over a soft surface. Adult hands underneath as a secondary safety net. Handling sessions for children should stay under five minutes initially. Teach the hand-walking technique from the first session; a child who learns to let the gecko walk rather than grip the gecko learns the correct approach for life.

SECTION 10

# Routine Care Calendar

| How often | What to do |
|---|---|
| Daily | Mist the enclosure in the evening; confirm droplets on leaves and glass; check the hygrometer reading |
| Daily | Confirm the room and enclosure temperature is within range; no reading above 82°F during hot weather |
| Daily | Replace the CGD cup with a fresh mix; remove the previous cup and rinse it |
| Daily | Check the water dish; refresh if cloudy or depleted |
| Daily | Spot-clean substrate — remove visible feces, urate deposits, and old shed fragments |
| Daily | Observe the gecko at dusk for 5 minutes: movement pattern, eye clarity, grip on branches, body condition, tail posture |
| Daily | Confirm the UVB lamp is on the correct photoperiod |
| Weekly | Remove and wash the water dish, CGD feeding ledge cup, and any other feeding surfaces with hot water and unscented mild soap; dry fully before replacing |
| Weekly | Inspect the sphagnum moss box; remoisten or replace if drying or developing an odor |
| Weekly | Offer live insects (1–2 times per week); observe feeding; remove any uneaten insects within 30 minutes |
| Weekly | Check body condition: hip bones should not be visible through skin; eyes should not be sunken; body should feel firm and well-rounded |
| Weekly | Check the calcium dish; top up if depleted |
| Weekly | Inspect all ten toe tips for retained shed, especially after any shedding event |
| Monthly | Deep clean the enclosure: remove the gecko to a temporary container, remove and replace substrate, wipe all surfaces with a reptile-safe disinfectant, allow to dry fully before replacing furniture and returning the gecko |
| Monthly | Wash cork bark and non-porous decor with hot water; allow to dry completely; replace sphagnum moss in the moss box |
| Monthly | Photograph the gecko from above and in lateral view for a body condition baseline to compare over time |
| Monthly | Review and reorder CGD and supplement supplies before running low |
| Every 6 months | Replace the UVB bulb or audit its output with a UV meter if you have one; UV degrades before visible output does |
| Annually | Exotics vet wellness check; baseline fecal exam; discuss egg-laying history if keeping females; review husbandry records |

SECTION 11

# When to See a Vet

Crested geckos mask illness. By the time behavioral changes are obvious to a keeper — hiding at unusual times, refusing CGD for a second consecutive cycle, a posture that seems slightly off — the underlying problem has frequently been developing for days. A small arboreal gecko weighing 40 grams has a narrow margin. **When you are not sure whether to call, call.**

**Go today — same day or emergency:**

- Open-mouth breathing or any audible respiratory noise — clicking, wheezing, popping — while the gecko is at rest
- A gecko who cannot grip any surface and is found at the bottom of the enclosure, flat and unresponsive to gentle touch
- Visible prolapse of any tissue from the cloaca (rear vent)
- Active straining in a female with no eggs deposited after 12 hours
- A gecko who was in an enclosure above 85°F and is showing lethargy, coordination loss, or open-mouth breathing
- Any obvious fracture, wound with exposed tissue, or a bleed that doesn't stop
- Sudden complete loss of grip, coordination loss, circling, or seizure-like activity
- A sunken eye that is obviously collapsing rather than just dull

**Book within a few days:**

- Retained shed on toes that does not release after two warm-soak sessions
- Any retained eye shed that doesn't release after two soaks
- Mouth tissue that is red, swollen, or showing any discharge
- Progressive weight loss — hip bones or pelvic outline becoming visible, or eyes appearing sunken over two to three weeks
- CGD refusal combined with any other symptom — lethargy, weight loss, loose stool
- A mite infestation not responding to over-the-counter treatment
- Any new lump or asymmetry anywhere on the body
- A female who is visibly gravid but shows no interest in the lay box over several days

Call the clinic before your appointment and confirm they have experience with small gecko species specifically. Bring a written record of the temperature and humidity range for the past two weeks, the current supplement schedule, a fresh fecal sample in a sealed container, and any photos of symptoms you've observed.

SECTION 12

# FAQ

## What do crested geckos eat?

Crested geckos eat primarily a commercially prepared powdered diet called Crested Gecko Diet, or CGD — a species-specific meal replacement that is mixed with water and offered in a small cup. CGD is genuinely complete nutrition for this species and should form the backbone of the diet, offered fresh every one to two days. Live insects — dubia roaches, crickets, and black soldier fly larvae are the best choices — are offered one to two times per week as enrichment and protein variety, not as replacements for the CGD. No fruit from your kitchen, no vegetables, and no insect-only diet; the CGD formula is what keeps this species nutritionally balanced, and it works.

## Do crested geckos need heat?

In most American homes, crested geckos do not require supplemental heat as long as the room stays between 72 and 78°F during the day. They evolved in the cooler mountain forests of New Caledonia and are not adapted to tropical heat — in fact, their upper limit is 85°F, above which heat stress becomes a genuine emergency. The important heating question for most American keepers is not whether to add heat but whether to add cooling: a room that reaches 86°F or above on hot summer days is a problem that requires air conditioning, not a heat lamp. For rooms that dip below 65°F in winter, a low-wattage ceramic heat emitter wired to a thermostat — set to maintain a minimum of 68°F — is the correct solution.

## How big do crested geckos get?

Adult crested geckos typically reach six to ten inches total length from snout to tail tip, and weigh between 35 and 65 grams — roughly the size and weight of a large chocolate bar. Females tend to sit at the lower end of the size range, males at the upper end. Body condition is more important to monitor than raw length; a well-fed adult should feel firm and rounded, with no visible hip or pelvic bones and no sunken eyes. Growth is most rapid in the first year of life and slows considerably after sexual maturity, which crested geckos typically reach at 15 to 18 months of age.

## How long do crested geckos live?

With good care, **15 to 20 years** is the realistic expectation for a crested gecko, and some individuals have exceeded that in well-documented captive collections. This makes the commitment comparable to adopting a dog or a cat. The factors that consistently push longevity toward the top of the range are a correct temperature ceiling (never above 85°F), consistent CGD as the primary diet, a functioning humidity cycle, and regular veterinary check-ins. A crested gecko acquired as a hatchling today in a Lancaster County household running the correct setup should still be thriving when the youngest child in that household graduates high school.

## Do crested geckos need UVB light?

Low-level UVB is now recommended by most reptile veterinarians and husbandry researchers, even though crested geckos have been kept without it for decades. The current evidence shows measurably improved bone density and more natural behavior in geckos with access to a Ferguson zone 1 UVB source — a UVI of 0.5 to 1.0, equivalent to dappled forest shade. A 5.0 or 6% T5 HO fluorescent tube positioned at the manufacturer's recommended distance from the enclosure provides this level correctly. The photoperiod should run 12 hours on and 12 off, and the bulb should be replaced every 12 months regardless of visible output because UV degrades before the visible light does. UVB is not strictly mandatory in the way heat is for a desert basking species, but it is the right thing to provide and the evidence for doing so is now strong enough that "optional" undersells it.

## What humidity do crested geckos need?

Crested geckos need an ambient enclosure humidity of 60 to 80%, delivered through a daily wet-dry cycle that mimics their native highland rainforest in New Caledonia. In practice, this means misting the enclosure thoroughly in the evening — raising humidity above 80% and leaving visible water droplets on leaves and glass for the gecko to drink from — and allowing the enclosure to dry gradually through the morning and afternoon, returning to around 60 to 70% by mid-afternoon. This cycling prevents the respiratory infections that result from sustained over-saturation, while ensuring the gecko stays properly hydrated and sheds cleanly. A digital hygrometer at mid-enclosure tracks the cycle accurately; a strip thermometer on the outside of the glass is not adequate for monitoring humidity.

## Will my crested gecko's tail grow back?

No. Crested geckos can drop their tail as a defensive response — called autotomy — and the tail does not regenerate afterward. This is one of the key differences between crested geckos and leopard geckos, which do regenerate a tail (though not a banded original). A crested gecko without a tail is affectionately called a "frogbutt" in the hobby and is otherwise completely healthy, with no reduction in quality of life, feeding ability, or lifespan. The stub heals cleanly if kept dry and on paper towel substrate for a few weeks after the drop. The practical implication for keepers is simple: never restrain a crested gecko by its tail, and never grab or close your hand around the tail during handling, because that is precisely the trigger the autotomy mechanism is designed to respond to.

## Can two crested geckos live together?

Crested geckos are strictly solitary animals and should be housed one per enclosure. Males cannot be cohabited at any age — they will fight, and the injuries can be severe. Two females may initially appear to tolerate each other, but in nearly every observed case a dominant-subordinate relationship develops in which the subordinate gecko is outcompeted for CGD, hides, and resting positions without any obvious dramatic aggression to alert the keeper. The subordinate's decline shows up weeks later as weight loss, skin problems, and immune depression. A single crested gecko in a well-furnished enclosure is a more confident, healthier animal than one sharing its space — they do not experience social isolation as mammals do, and they do not benefit from companionship.

## How often do you feed a crested gecko?

A fresh CGD cup should be offered every one to two days — prepare a new mix, place it in the enclosure, and remove and discard any uneaten remainder after 24 hours before it ferments. Live insects are offered separately one to two times per week as enrichment feeders, not as replacements for the CGD. Juveniles under six months may benefit from a CGD cup available every day and insects twice a week; adults do fine with a cup every other day. Seasonal appetite fluctuations are normal, especially in autumn and winter, and a gecko who ignores the cup for a few days during that period is not an emergency as long as body condition remains good. The check is always body condition — firm, well-rounded body, no visible hip bones, clear and alert eyes — not whether the cup was touched last night.

## How do you handle a crested gecko?

Crested geckos are handled most effectively using the hand-walking technique: rather than holding or gripping the gecko, you provide a continuously moving surface by passing one hand forward as the other falls behind, allowing the gecko to walk across your hands at her own pace. The gecko never feels trapped, never has an obvious escape blocked, and gradually learns that your hands are a safe and unfrightening environment. Start with short sessions of two to three minutes after the first two weeks of settling in, building gradually as the gecko relaxes. Never reach down from above, which mimics a predator; always scoop from below with a smooth upward motion supporting the full body. Never grab, restrain, or touch the tail. When the gecko signals stress — gaping, vocalizing, repeated escape attempts, flattening her body against your hand — end the session immediately and return her to the enclosure. Consistent short calm sessions build more trust more quickly than long stressful ones.

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SECTION 13

# Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country** — not as a checkout option, not as a promotional campaign, but as a standing commitment off the top of every order. Responsible pet ownership and community care aren't separate things, and they never should be.

That commitment carries a specific meaning for reptile keepers. Crested geckos — along with leopard geckos and ball pythons — are among the most common surrenders at reptile rescues, almost always because an owner didn't know that 85°F was dangerous, didn't know the tail doesn't grow back, and bought a setup based on what the pet store had on the shelf. If you've read this far, you're not that person. And if you're open to it, the rescues in your region have crested geckos waiting for a keeper who knows what they're doing. Adopting a "frogbutt" from a rescue is one of the most rewarding things a new keeper can do.

We're a family operation in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and carry the clean-label, American-made goods we'd put in front of our own pets. **No mystery ingredients.** No CGD we wouldn't feed our own geckos. If you have a question about your humidity cycle, your supplement schedule, or what to do about a tail your gecko just dropped, call us at **(717) 983-8069** — we'd genuinely rather talk you through it.

Welcome to fifteen to twenty years of a gecko who walks out to meet you every evening.

*From our family to yours,***Walnut Creek Supply** — Christiana, Pennsylvania *walnutcreeksupply.com*