Gargoyle Gecko

Rhacodactylus auriculatus | Expanded owner guide | Habitat, feeding, health and costs

Gargoyle geckos are arboreal, evening-active reptiles from New Caledonia. They need a tall secure enclosure, safe climbing routes, stable moderate temperatures, humidity that can dry between mistings, and a complete gecko diet.

At a glance

The bumpy cranial ridges give the species its common name. Gargoyle geckos can jump, climb and use the tail for balance. A startled animal may drop its tail; unlike a crested gecko, a gargoyle gecko can regrow it, usually with a different texture or shape.

Lifespan and size

Plan for about 15–20 years in captivity. Many adults measure roughly 7–9 inches (18–23 cm), with variation among individuals.

Experience and routine

A prepared beginner may do well, but this is a long-term commitment. Daily checks, correct ventilation and humidity, secure climbing furniture, a suitable diet and an experienced reptile veterinarian are essential.

House one gecko per enclosure as the safest default. Shared housing can lead to stress, bites, tail loss, injury and unplanned breeding.



Illustrative species photograph

Care through every life stage

Adjust care to growth, body condition, temperature, appetite and health. Keep records so gradual changes are visible.

Hatchling and juvenile

- Provide secure, reachable climbing routes and abundant cover. A smaller grow-out enclosure may help a tiny juvenile locate food and be monitored safely, but plan the adult enclosure in advance.

- Offer a complete powdered gecko diet mixed by its label directions. Track whether the juvenile is eating and growing.

- Weigh periodically with a gram scale when this can be done calmly.

Adult

- Keep the complete gecko diet as the nutritional base. Offer gut-loaded insects as appropriate for body condition and a veterinarian’s plan.

- Maintain a stable day-night rhythm, safe vertical routes, clean cups and a controlled humidity cycle.

Senior or chronically ill gecko

- Ask the veterinarian whether food schedule, insect portions, supplements, climbing access or monitoring should change.

- New weight loss, poor grip, reduced appetite or lethargy needs review rather than being assumed to be normal aging.

Care log

Record	Use
Weight, date, body shape	Spot weight or muscle loss early.
Food offered and eaten	Notice diet acceptance and appetite trends.
Temperature and humidity	Compare before/after equipment or weather changes.
Shed, stool, grip, behavior	Give the vet a useful history.

Build a secure vertical habitat

Height, cover and stable routes matter. Provide enough connected climbing structure without creating dangerous falls.

Adult enclosure and furnishings

Item	Planning note
Enclosure	A common adult target is a ventilated vertical enclosure about 18 x 18 x 24 inches or larger; additional height and floor area can provide more choices.
Branches and cork	Use sturdy routes at several heights and angles. Test each support for movement before the gecko uses it.
Foliage and hides	Create shaded cover and resting retreats, including choices at different temperatures.
Food cups	Secure shallow feeding ledges so the gecko can reach them without unsafe jumps.
Water dish	Keep a shallow stable dish with fresh water even if the gecko drinks droplets.
Sensors	Use digital thermometers and a hygrometer; a thermostat is needed for any controlled heat source.

Prepare before arrival

- Run lights and any heat source for several days; record warm and cool area readings.
- Secure doors, mesh, cords, lamp guards and gaps. Keep the habitat away from direct sun and household traffic.
- Add connected climbing surfaces and softer landing areas; remove unstable stones or exposed sharp décor.

Gargoyle geckos are climbers but can jump or fall. Secure every branch, ledge and plant support.

Temperature, humidity and lighting

These geckos generally prefer moderate temperatures. Avoid prolonged heat and give the enclosure time to partly dry between misting cycles.

Measure temperature

- Use a digital thermometer at both the upper warmer area and the cooler zone. Care sources vary slightly in exact target readings; ask a reptile veterinarian to review the setup and the location of sensors.

- If supplemental heat is needed, choose a reptile-appropriate source on a thermostat. Prevent direct contact burns.

- Avoid prolonged temperatures above about 82–84°F (28–29°C); overheating can be dangerous. Monitor rooms during heat waves and power outages.

Manage humidity with ventilation

- A common care range is approximately 50–70% overall, with a temporary rise after misting. Let surfaces dry partly before the next misting and keep air moving.

- Use a hygrometer. A constantly wet, poorly ventilated enclosure encourages mold and may contribute to skin or respiratory problems.

- Provide fresh water in a dish. Many geckos also lick droplets from leaves, branches and walls after misting.

Lighting and UVB

- Use a regular daytime photoperiod and keep nights dark. Low-level, measured UVB is considered beneficial in many current care guides; choose a safe species-specific output and distance.

- Replace UVB lamps on the manufacturer’s schedule and note the date. Glass or plastic between lamp and animal blocks UVB.

When a reading is off

Check sensor placement, thermostat, room conditions and ventilation. If safe temperatures cannot be restored, call the reptile clinic for instructions.

Climbing routes, substrate and cleaning

A planted look is optional. Secure furnishings, clean feeding surfaces and predictable ventilation matter more than decoration.

Build useful structure

- Connect branches, cork bark and foliage so the gecko can choose sheltered or open routes.
- Use smooth, stable surfaces without exposed nails, sharp edges or narrow gaps where toes can catch.
- Check attachment points regularly; suction cups can loosen and branches can shift as humidity changes.

Flooring and naturalistic setups

- Paper towel or an easy-clean substrate may be helpful during quarantine, illness or routine monitoring.
- For a planted setup, use materials suitable for humid tropical enclosures and prevent ingestion of large particles. Ask your vet before substrate changes for a sick animal.
- Remove moldy, foul-smelling or heavily soiled material. Avoid cedar, pine oils, sharp gravel and unsafe loose décor.

Cleaning rhythm

When	Routine
Daily	Refresh water, remove stool and old food, spot-clean and check temperature/humidity.
As needed	Wash cups and ledges; replace soiled substrate or moldy material.
Regular deep clean	Use a reptile-safe cleaner per label, rinse and dry furnishings completely before returning them.

Wash hands after reptile contact and keep enclosure tools and dishes away from kitchens and food preparation areas.

Nutrition: complete gecko diet

A complete powdered crested/gargoyle gecko diet can provide the nutritional base. Follow the exact mix, feeding and disposal directions on its label.

Choose a complete formula

- Use a reputable product labeled as a complete diet for crested or gargoyle geckos.
- Do not use plain fruit puree, baby food or homemade mixtures as a staple; these can lack balanced nutrients.
- Prepare fresh portions with clean utensils. Remove old food according to label guidance before it spoils.

Offer food at the right time

- Offer food in the evening, when the gecko is becoming active. Licking may be hard to notice, so monitor weight and routine rather than judging from a clean cup alone.
- Keep feeding ledges stable and low enough to reach safely.
- If changing formulas, transition gradually and track acceptance.

Fruit and treats

- Fresh fruit is not required as a staple. Keep treats occasional and discuss them with a veterinarian.
- Do not add unapproved human vitamins or supplements to a complete formula.

A sudden loss of appetite can have many causes, including temperature, stress, shedding or illness. Review husbandry and call a reptile veterinarian if it persists or weight declines.

Feeder insects and supplements

Gut-loaded feeder insects can add variety and enrichment. A complete commercial gecko diet remains the base unless a reptile veterinarian recommends otherwise.

Offering insects safely

- Suitable options may include appropriately sized crickets or dubia roaches. Select species, size and frequency based on age and body condition.

- Gut-load insects with a suitable feeder diet before offering them. Remove uneaten live prey.

- Avoid wild-caught insects and prey that is too large or difficult to swallow.

Supplement guidance

- Ask the veterinarian whether feeder insects should be dusted and which calcium or multivitamin product to use.

- Do not add calcium, vitamin D3 or multivitamins to complete gecko diet unless its label or veterinarian directs it.

- Using multiple supplements without a schedule can result in excess or imbalance.

Feeding notes

Date	Complete diet	Insects/supplement	Eating/weight note
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Hydration

Mist to provide droplets and maintain an appropriate humidity cycle, but let the enclosure dry partly between sessions. Keep clean drinking water available every day.

Bathing, misting and shedding

A routine bath is generally not part of daily gargoyle gecko care. Mist and humidity management support hydration and normal shedding.

Does a gargoyle gecko need bathing?

Healthy gargoyle geckos do not need scheduled baths. Provide fresh water and a suitable misting routine. The gecko may lick droplets from enclosure surfaces.

If the gecko is dirty or has stuck shed

- Contact a reptile veterinarian before soaking, rinsing or trying to remove shed, especially if toes, eyes or tail are affected.

- If a veterinarian directs a rinse, use a very shallow amount of clean lukewarm water in a secure container and supervise continuously. Never use soap, shampoo, oils or additives.

- A weak animal can chill, aspirate or drown. Do not use a bath to treat dehydration or illness at home.

Shedding care

- The skin may look dull before a shed. Maintain the normal humidity cycle and provide secure climbing surfaces.

- Check toes and tail for retained skin after shedding. Do not peel or cut skin.

- Call a veterinarian if shed remains constricting, causes swelling, affects an eye, or shedding problems recur.

No weekly bath is needed. Correct humidity, clean water, ventilation and gentle veterinary-directed care are the safer routine.

Handling, behavior and tail safety

This quick gecko may jump when startled. Keep handling calm, brief and close to a soft landing surface.

Build tolerance gradually

Step	Try	Pause when
Settle	Give a new gecko time to adjust before handling.	It is newly arrived, shedding or eating poorly.
Offer a hand	Move slowly; let it step onto your hand voluntarily.	It repeatedly flees, opens its mouth or shows defensive behavior.
Support	Use both hands as a platform close to a couch or low padded surface.	It struggles or jumps; return it safely.
Return	Let it step onto a branch or enclosure wall. End early.	Never grab or restrain the tail.

Tail drop and regrowth

Gargoyle geckos can drop a tail as a defense response and often regrow one. The replacement may look different. Tail loss can still be stressful and the area should be checked; ask a reptile veterinarian about wound care and monitoring.

Behavior and enrichment

- Use foliage and connected climbing routes for exploration and cover.
- Avoid chasing, tapping glass, loud disturbances and waking the gecko for play.
- Handle near the floor or over a soft surface because jumping can happen suddenly.

Other pets and household hygiene

Dogs and cats can injure a small gecko, even if they seem curious or gentle. Safe separation is the rule.

Cats, dogs and other pets

- Keep the terrarium in a location where cats or dogs cannot knock it over, paw at the screen or sit on top of it.
- Do not allow direct contact or introductions. A bite, scratch, chase or paw strike can injure or severely stress a gecko.
- When the gecko is out, keep other pets behind a closed door and supervise continuously.
- House one gecko in its own enclosure. Do not mix it with a crested gecko or any other reptile species; their needs and disease risks differ.

Children and visitors

- An adult should supervise. Teach children not to grab the tail, chase, squeeze or tap the enclosure.
- Give the gecko a quiet place away from busy household activity.

Salmonella prevention

- Reptiles can carry Salmonella while appearing healthy. Wash hands with soap and water after handling the gecko, food, stool or enclosure items.
- Keep gecko dishes and cleaning equipment out of kitchens and food-preparation areas.
- Use extra precautions around children under five, adults 65 and older, and people with weakened immune systems.

Keep cats and dogs physically separated from the gecko, including during handling. A secure enclosure is not a reason to let pets paw or climb on it.

Daily care and veterinary checkups

A reliable daily routine and regular exams help detect environmental problems and illness before they become severe.

Daily/weekly routine

When	Care
Daily	Check temperatures and humidity; refresh water; mist appropriately; remove stool and leftover food.
Feeding days	Offer complete diet or approved insects; record acceptance and remove old food.
Weekly/regular	Inspect branches and guards, clean ledges, check body condition and review equipment.

How often to see a vet

- Arrange a baseline exam after acquisition with a veterinarian experienced in reptiles.

- Ask whether an annual wellness exam and fecal check are appropriate. The vet may recommend a different interval by age, health, origin or exposure.

- Juveniles, animals with chronic illness, breeding geckos or those recovering from treatment may need more frequent follow-up.

What to bring and ask

- Bring current weight and feeding notes, stool information, photos of the habitat, exact lamp/thermostat models and temperature/humidity readings.

- Ask about body condition, mouth, eyes, skin, toes, tail, diet, supplements and parasite screening.

- Routine vaccines are not generally used for pet reptiles.

Illness signs and treatment

A persistent change in appetite, weight, grip or behavior deserves attention. Small reptiles can decline quickly.

Warning sign	Action
Labored breathing, open-mouth breathing at rest, discharge	Call a reptile veterinarian urgently; breathing difficulty is an emergency.
Weak grip, tremors, poor coordination, cannot climb or move normally	Seek prompt veterinary care; prevent falls during transport.
Rapid weight loss, poor body condition, persistent refusal to eat	Call the clinic promptly and bring weight/feeding records. Do not force-feed.
Swollen eyes, mouth changes, sores, jaw or limb changes	Arrange veterinary examination; do not apply human creams or change supplements at random.
Retained shed constricting toes or tail, injury or tail-drop wound	Contact a reptile veterinarian. Do not pull, cut or scrub the area.
Diarrhea, blood, prolapse, severe straining	Seek urgent same-day veterinary advice.

Possible veterinary evaluation

Depending on the exam, the veterinarian may recommend a fecal test, imaging, blood work, prescription treatment, wound care or supportive care. Overheating, dehydration, nutritional imbalance, parasites and infection can look similar, so diagnosis matters.

Do not self-treat

- Do not use human, cat or dog medication, leftover antibiotics, dewormers, oils or concentrated vitamins without veterinary instruction.
- Do not syringe food or water into the mouth or attempt to remove an obstruction at home.

Severe weakness, breathing difficulty, serious injury or inability to climb/move normally needs urgent care. Call ahead to find a clinic that treats reptiles.

Approximate costs in the United States

These are planning ranges, not quotes. Prices vary by store, enclosure type, shipping, local electricity rates and veterinary clinic.

Expense	Approximate range	Notes
Vertical adult enclosure	$170–$300	Current 18 x 18 x 24-inch example lists around $179 before shipping.
Branches, plants, hides, ledges	$60–$180	Secure climbing décor and cover; bioactive builds can cost more.
Low-level UVB kit/light	$35–$100	Exact kit and replacement schedule vary.
Thermometers, hygrometer, thermostat/heat	$45–$130	Supplemental heat may not be needed in every home, but any heat source needs control.
Substrate, cups, cleaning supplies	$25–$80	Basic initial supplies.
Initial setup estimate	About $350–$750	Before animal purchase, tax/shipping or vet reserve.

Ongoing monthly costs

- Complete gecko diet: about $10–$25 monthly depending on brand, package size and feeding rate.
- Feeder insects and gut-load supplies: roughly $5–$25 monthly depending on how often insects are offered.
- Cleaning supplies, substrate and bulb-replacement reserve: about $5–$20 monthly on average.
- Electricity: approximately $5–$15 monthly, depending on climate and equipment.
- Routine vet reserve: set aside about $10–$20 monthly; published exotic clinic exam examples are roughly $90–$115 before diagnostics.

Plan roughly $35–$85 per month for routine supplies and an annual vet reserve. Keep a separate emergency fund; diagnostics and treatment can add hundreds of dollars.

Choosing a gecko and responsible ownership

Review the animal’s history, source and habitat before buying or adopting.

Questions for a seller or rescue

- What is the exact species, hatch date, captive-bred status and source? Is sex known?
- What complete food and insect routine does it use? Can I see weight, feeding, shedding and veterinary records?
- Has it dropped its tail or been treated for parasites, mouth, skin or shedding problems?
- Can I see its current enclosure, temperature readings and humidity cycle? What is the return or rehoming policy?
- May my reptile veterinarian examine it after transfer?

Before you commit

- Set up the adult enclosure, locate a reptile veterinarian and budget for both routine and emergency care.
- Check state, county and city rules and keep proof of source and purchase.
- If you keep other reptiles, ask a veterinarian about quarantine, separate rooms and testing.

Travel and long-term plan

- Transport in a secure, ventilated carrier with a non-slip liner; avoid direct sun, drafts and hot parked cars.
- Never release a pet outdoors. If you cannot continue care, contact a reptile rescue or qualified rehoming organization.
- Breeding requires health screening, genetics, egg and hatchling care, and confirmed placements. Do not breed casually.

References and further reading

Use current veterinary guidance for individual temperature targets, supplements, diagnosis and treatment.

Care and veterinary references

Aurora Animal Hospital, Gargoyle Gecko Care Sheet
Merck Veterinary Manual, Management and Husbandry of Reptiles
Merck Veterinary Manual, Routine Health Care of Reptiles
CDC, Reptiles and Amphibians
Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians, Find a Vet

Book supplied for further reading

Billy Adamz, Gargoyle Geckos: The Complete Guide to Gargoyle Gecko Care, Habitat Setup, Feeding, Handling, and Breeding for Beginners and Enthusiasts

The linked listing corresponds to a 224-page independently published paperback (ISBN 9798293098576). Use it as supplementary reading and verify medical and husbandry claims with a reptile veterinarian.

Price examples checked November 2026

ReptileSupply, 18 x 18 x 24-inch Arboreal Gecko Enclosure
Exotic Pet Vets, Exam Pricing

Educational guide only. It does not replace veterinary advice or current local legal requirements. Seek urgent veterinary care for breathing difficulty, severe weakness, serious injury or rapid weight loss.