



Madagascar Ground Geckos

Paroedura picta

BEGINNER · 4-5 IN ADULT · 10-15 YR LIFESPAN · NOCTURNAL · MADAGASCAR

You will meet this one on table after table at any NARBC show, sold as a pictus, a panther, or an ocelot gecko. Same animal each time: *Paroedura picta*, a palm-sized ground gecko out of Madagascar. It is among the hardiest geckos in the hobby and among the most prolific, and the second half of that sentence is what catches people. Easy to keep, easy to breed by accident.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	4-5 inches
Lifespan	10-15 years
Ambient temp	75-82 °F
Warm spot	85-88 °F
Night drop	70-74 °F
Humidity	50-70 %
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Diet	Insects, every 2-3 days



Paroedura picta, the Madagascar ground gecko: captive-bred animals fill breeder tables at every NARBC show.

Photo: Charles J. Sharp / Wikimedia Commons · CC BY-SA 4.0

01

Hardy, Quick, Not a Lap Gecko

A good step between a leopard gecko and Madagascar's fussier species: hardy, undemanding, and much quicker than a first-time keeper expects. Pictus are nocturnal, so an animal that stays hidden all day is behaving normally, not sulking. Handle low, over a deep bin or sitting on the floor, keep sessions short, and never lift one by the tail. Like most small geckos they drop it under pressure, and what grows back is a stub, not the original. Hardy is not the same as tolerant.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space beats height for a ground gecko; every stage below wants a horizontal footprint. Hatchlings and juveniles do well in small tubs or rack drawers, where you can actually find them. Adults want the glass: 24×18×12 at minimum, 36×18×18 if you have the room. On company, one rule: **house males and females apart unless you are deliberately breeding**. A paired female lays clutch after clutch, and it comes out of her. Males kept together will fight.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	8×8×8	12×8×8	Fast-growing and hardy; rack drawers are fine at this size.
Juvenile	12×8×8	18×12×12	Readily breeds; sexual maturity by 8-12 months, so sex them early.
Subadult	18×12×12	24×18×12	Nocturnal and terrestrial; a simple horizontal setup works well.
Adult	24×18×12	36×18×18	Racks only conditionally; adults do better with real floor space.

Enclosure sizes follow Habitat-OS life-stage guidance for *Paroedura picta*. The minimum is a floor, not a target.

03

Heat & Light

Build the gradient across the floor: 75–82 °F ambient with a warm spot at 85–88 °F, and let nights fall to 70–74 °F. Every heat source runs through a thermostat, and heat rocks have no place in the setup; a gecko will sit on one until it burns. Low-output UVB is worth adding even for a nocturnal animal, paired with a shaded hide so it can choose the dark. Keep the light cycle regular.

04

Humidity & Water

Target 50–70 percent, sitting nearer 50–60 for adults, and let the enclosure dry between mistings rather than staying wet. A cage that never dries out is the one that causes trouble. Give a shallow water dish they can climb out of, keep it filled, and add one humid hide packed with damp moss; that hide carries them through the dry stretch and does most of the shedding work for you. Check the toes after every shed.

05

Substrate & Furnishing

Start young geckos on paper towel. It is not pretty, but loose sand plus a small gecko with an appetite is an impaction waiting to happen. Adults do well on a soil and sand blend deep enough to hold a burrow, topped with leaf litter and cork bark laid flat. Two hides, warm end and cool end, plus the humid one. Give any adult female a lay box of damp substrate whether or not you plan on eggs; she will use it.

06

Feeding

Crickets and mealworms every 2–3 days, nothing wider than the space between the gecko's eyes. Gut-load the insects the day before; a gecko is only as good as what the bug ate. Dust with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus, at most feedings, and add a D3 multivitamin weekly while they grow, twice monthly once adult. That is their only D3, so skip the D3 calcium. Leave a small dish of the plain calcium out for adult females; eggs are made of it. The tail is the fat store; read condition there.

07

Health Red Flags

Two things put a pictus in front of a vet. The first is a calcium crash: tremors, a soft or rubbery jaw, a weak grip, a female suddenly off food. The second is a bound egg, and a female straining with nothing to show for it is an emergency, not a wait. Smaller and catchable: stuck shed ringing a toe, a tail that keeps thinning, no droppings. Weigh monthly, and take the first two to a reptile vet the same day.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.