

Choosing a healthy leopard gecko.

The most important thing to do when you get ready to purchase a gecko is make sure that you are getting a healthy specimen. It won't matter how elaborately your terrarium is decorated or how much money you've already spent on supplies and food if your prize gecko dies of cryptosporidiosis two weeks after you buy him. The first thing you should do is consider who you will buy the animal from. **If you are thinking about buying from Petsmart or Petco you should first read my write up entitled "Why Not Petco?"** In it, I give five good reasons NOT to buy a leopard gecko from either of them. **Your best choice is to buy an animal from a small-time, private breeder who specializes in geckos.** It's best if you can find one in your area. That way, if you have any problems with the animal after the purchase is made you can contact them easily for help. If you don't know of anyone locally, the next best thing to do is visit a reptile show or expo in your area. Most large cities have one, and I would bet that you can find one within a few hours drive of your house if you look hard enough on the internet. Trust me. I've spent enough time with sick animals to know that a long drive to get a healthy gecko is worth the headache. When you choose a place to buy from, the following are some things to look for to ensure you are getting a healthy pet.

Never buy a hatchling

Sure, they are cute and cuddly looking and it would be fun to watch them grow up, but typically the younger animals are less likely to survive than older, already established individuals. I would never buy a leopard gecko any smaller than 3-4 inches, especially if you are thinking about breeding.

Make sure they have all their body parts

A lot of geckos are kept in large groups until they are sold. They're fed only once or twice a week and, as you would expect, a feeding frenzy ensues that can often leave animals without fingers, toes, and tails.

Never buy an animal that has sustained any kind of noticeable injury.



Check out the poop!!!



External injuries are easily seen, but the primary health issue for leopard geckos is an internal one: parasites. Most intestinal parasites cause some type of gastrointestinal discomfort (stomach ache). The most common symptoms are throwing up and diarrhea. A typical leopard gecko dropping looks like what's in the picture. All droppings should be solid with a white(ish) portion and a darker portion. If the stools appear runny, watery, discolored, or abnormal, then consider going to the next table at the reptile show.

Inspect the animal for the following:

Eyes should be open and alert unless the animal is hiding (sleeping).

Body coloration should be bright and vibrant unless the animal is about to shed.

Legs should appear strong and the animal should be alert and active.

The snout and fingers should look whole and strong. They should not have any pieces of unshed skin still clinging to them.

The tail is where excess water and fat are stored. It should be nice and plump and not show any signs that it has ever been damaged.

