

# General Leopard Gecko Care: Hatchlings

There are few things about keeping leopard geckos that are more rewarding than walking up to your incubator and for the first time staring inside it to see two little eyes peering back up at you. Once the excitement has subsided, however, you might be wondering "what next"? The best time to learn about how to care for hatchlings is while they are still curled up inside the shell. That way, when they come out running, you'll be ready for them.

## Hatching

Hatching is when your new baby enters the world. It's a crucial first step and shouldn't be taken lightly. **If you are a responsible breeder, you'll already have a place to put your new geckos before they hatch**, so you won't be frantically searching around your house looking for something to stick them in.

If you had several eggs incubating in one container, you'll need to get the hatchling out fairly quickly so that it doesn't disturb the other eggs. **Never pick a hatchling up out of the incubation cup**. The best thing to do is simply lift the cup and set it down inside the enclosure you have already made for the gecko. Open the lid and let the gecko come out on his own. At that point you should probably leave him alone for the rest of the day. Hatchlings don't eat until after they have consumed their first skin shed which usually takes about 3 days. Don't put any food in with them over these first few days to avoid stressing them out. You should also have the enclosure designed in such a way that most of the walls are covered up by paper towels or something so that the gecko can't see out. This will help it feel more secure in its new surroundings.

When the hatchling is secure, go back to your incubation cup and remove the egg shell, as well as any incubation medium that appears to be soiled with "egg juice". This will help keep molds and fungi at bay.

## Housing

Nobody is going to be impressed with an elaborate set-up for a hatchling. Your focus should not be to create an incredibly natural looking habitat, complete with all the works. Your focus should be to raise some healthy geckos. The best thing to do is keep it as simple as possible. Everything you need to have to house

hatchlings can be seen in the following picture. If you aren't raising a ton of babies, a simple 10 gallon aquarium will suffice. **The substrate should always consist of paper towels or newsprint.** Never use sand for hatchlings under any circumstances.



Their digestive tracts are too small and they will become heavily impacted. You need to wait until they grow to about six inches in total length before putting them on a sand substrate. The other things you need in the enclosure are moist and dry hides. As you can see in the picture, I made my hides out of an egg crate and the bottom of a plastic tub. Keep it simple (and disposable). **You will also need a shallow dish filled with plenty of small mealworms and something to hold water in (jar lids work fantastic for this job).** In a 10 gallon aquarium like this one, you can keep as many as 3 or 4 hatchlings, but I wouldn't recommend anymore. They tend to start out-competing one another for food and resources and usually at least one's health begins to fail a bit.

**The temperature in the enclosure should be the same as what you would provide for an adult: a heat gradient from 90-77° F.** I don't recommend an under-tank heater if you use the above set-up with a 10 gallon aquarium. If the heater

gets too hot, there isn't much substrate between it and your prize geckos. Overhead lamps work great for this setup. If you are producing a lot of babies, you should probably go to a rack system which can be safely heated from below with heat-tape of some sort.

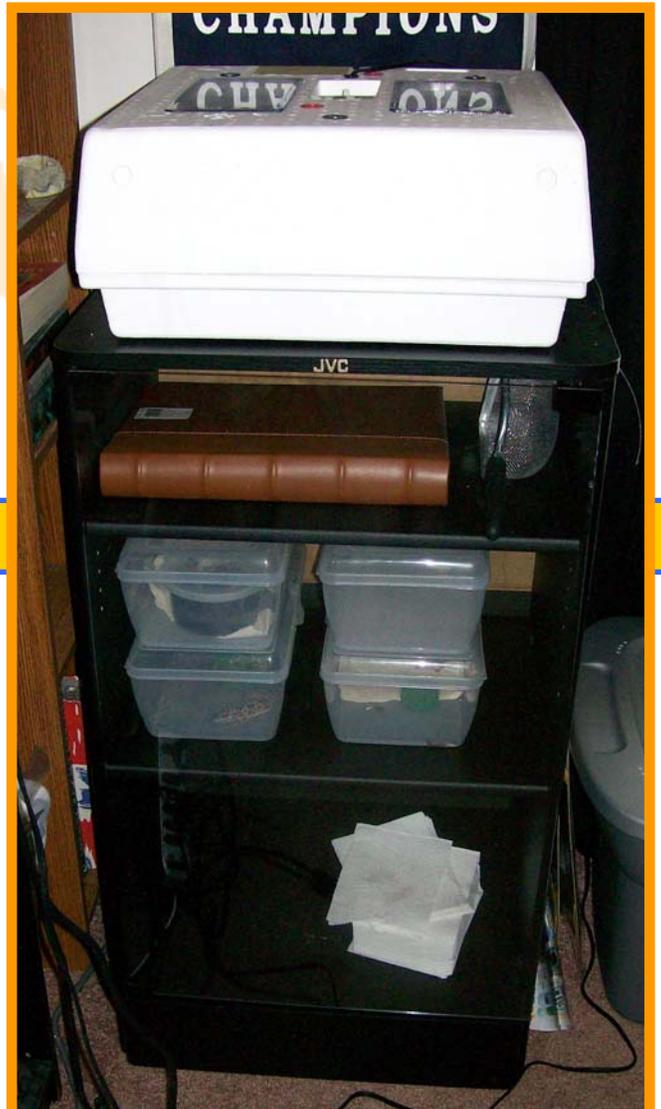
## Feeding

Feeding is an essential part of keeping any animal, and it is especially crucial for hatchling leopard geckos. They are almost always hungry and will eat you out of house and home if you are not careful. [The best way to provide food for your geckos is to place mealworms in a wide, shallow dish of some sort and allow them to free-feed as often as they like.](#) You should always choose mealworms (or crickets) that are about half the size of the gecko's head.

Be sure to gut-load your feeder organisms by feeding them a diet rich in nutrients and minerals prior to offering them to your geckos. You can do this by feeding them chicken mash, fruits, vegetables, or dry dog/cat food. You should dust them with a calcium supplement about twice a week to ensure that your animals are getting plenty of calcium to grow strong bones. [Calcium deficiency is a real problem with growing leopard geckos and can lead to weak bones, muscle spasms, and eventually death.](#)

## Rack System

The best method for raising hatchlings is to keep them in a rack system of some kind. In this scenario, you house them singly or in pairs in some type of cheap plastic shoe box. My rack system is good for someone like me who doesn't do this for a living. I found a used JCV rack that was designed for housing a sound system and converted it into a hatchling rack. I heat it with under-tank heaters (which work well since this is such a



small rack). You can tell that it isn't full (as hatching is a bit slow at the moment). Anything of similar type will work (even bookshelves). The hardest part is finding a way to heat it. Most people use heat-tape to heat their racks. I am not an expert with heat-tape (I've never used it) and so I won't pretend to tell you how to do it. If you do a google search I am sure you can come up with some good information about it.

The best thing to keep hatchlings in is a small setup like the one shown at right. A container like this isn't the cheapest container (of course it was still only \$2.00) but it is much more escape-proof than some other plastic shoe boxes you can buy that are cheaper.



The essential units to this setup are the same as listed above, a moist hide, a food dish, and a water dish with paper substrate.



If you keep them warm and well-fed, hatchlings will grow fairly quickly. You should implement these same husbandry

techniques until they are about six inches in total length. At this point, they can be moved to a more natural display setup with sand, rocks, and the works. However, it is not necessary to do so. Many breeders keep their animals on paper towels and feed them out of plastic dishes until adulthood when they are sold.