

# General Leopard Gecko Care: Shipping



If you've been in the business of keeping leopard geckos for very long and you've mastered the art of breeding and selling them to help pay for your habit,

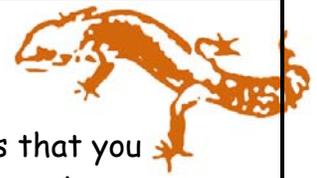
you may have thrown around the idea of shipping them in order to broaden your market a little. There are several reasons to ship leopard geckos. Obviously you can reach more customers if you are able to ship, and the reptile business is virtually teeming with companies who ship, even worldwide, to reach new customers. If you decide to ship animals, you not only



open yourself up to a world full of individual hobbyists, you also start working with an ever-growing list of dealers who buy wholesale. I had a friend who was once given an entire breeding group of bearded dragons, including 19 hatchlings and 24 eggs. He sold all 19 hatchlings to the same customer for \$25.00 each and shipped them all UPS (with a little help from yours truly) to Texas. Shipping will also give you a market to fall back on during times of the year when business in your particular area is slow or in places where reptile shows and expos are few and far between (The closest reptile show to me is a 4 hr. drive). I don't have a great deal of experience shipping live animals (although I do have some). What I do have to offer is extensive experience and familiarity with the shipping industry (as I have worked with UPS for years). With enough practice, patience, and knowledge, anyone can ship leopard geckos confidently with few problems.

## Packaging

The first thing you must know when it comes to shipping leopard geckos is the business of packaging. I am a UPS certified packaging expert (although that does



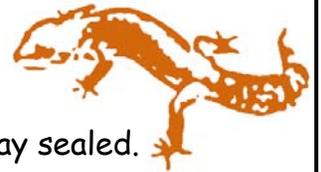
not include certification in packaging live animals). I have packaged things that you probably wouldn't imagine could even be packaged, but if you did your research you would find that packaging animals is not really that different from packaging other fragile items like fine china or jewelry. The basic concepts are the same.

The primary points of damage to any package are on the outside (obviously). Logic would tell you that you want to keep the item(s) away from the outer edge of the box. If I were to package a glass ornament being sent to grandma at Christmas, I would first wrap the ornament in bubble-wrap and then place it in a box large enough so that there would be room to put some kind of packing fill around it (like styro-foam p-nuts: 3 inches to be exact by UPS standards). Now, you can't bubble-wrap a gecko, but you can protect it. The best choice is to use a deli-cup like the one shown in the picture. Depending on what you are shipping



(adults, juveniles, hatchlings) you should probably only put one animal per cup. In fact, I would recommend not putting anymore than one gecko per cup. If you are shipping small hatchlings, its best to simply get smaller cups and house them individually for travel. You should put a few paper towels in the cup with the gecko to do a few things: first, it will add a bit of cushion for the gecko in case the box gets dropped or

bumped (which it WILL). Second, it will take up some of the extra space in the cup and allow the animal to feel more secure. Third, it will absorb any moisture from the expunging of bodily fluids during travel (in other words, it's a good spot to poop on when you're clinging on for dear life as a Fed-Ex truck barrels down the interstate at 90 MPH). Actually getting the gecko to go into the deli-cup is a feat in and of itself. They will resist you, and in the end you will have to force them to go. This is only the beginning of the stressful process of shipping. Once the gecko is inside the cup it will do what anyone would do; try to get out. This is another

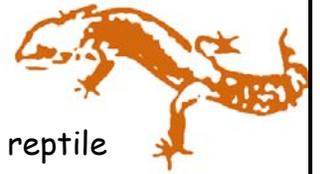


reason why you should invest in some good quality deli-cups that will stay sealed. You might also tape them to be sure. Another advantage to these deli-cups is that they already have pre-drilled holes in them. If you decide to use some other type of cup, like an empty butter tub, don't forget to put your own holes in them (as air is important to geckos).

You need to choose a box that is the right size for your shipment, and is clearly labeled fragile and "this side up". If you are shipping one animal then you need a much smaller box than if you are shipping ten. Regardless of what size or quantity you use, you need about three inches of packaging on either side of the gecko. You can stack several containers of geckos on top of one another or place them side by side, but the outer-most containers need about three inches of packaging around them. The best packaging materials are either packaging p-nuts or crumpled newsprint. Both of these provide stability and cushion and still allow for good air circulation. You will also need a strong and sturdy box that is lined with packaging foam sheets. This will add strength and



stability to the box and decrease the chances of it being crushed. The box in the picture needs to be lined with styro-foam in order to be ready for shipment. Once the gecko has been placed in the box you can add your packaging material around it. The only other thing you need to complete this packaging job is something to provide heat. They make



special heat-packs that you can purchase relatively inexpensively. Most reptile supply places carry them. You can also go to Wal-Mart or any store that carries camping materials and get some hand-warmers that will work relatively well. You can tape the warmer to the top or bottom of the box or simply place one in a couple of corners. You obviously need to keep an eye on the current temperatures in your neck of the woods as well as where the animals will be delivered. **You should never ship on extremely hot or cold days.** Most buyers are willing to work with you on a shipping date that will be most beneficial for the animals. When you get ready to seal the box up, you can use any kind of packaging tape. Just run one or two strips across the long seam of the box and do not tape up the edges. You will need room for air to get through. If you like, you can tape up all seams of the box and put a few small holes in the sides, but I don't recommend this method.

## Shipping

I've got a lot of experience shipping packages. The following is a list of advice that I offer when you get ready to ship your leopard geckos (or any animal).

- **Never ship later in the week than Wednesday.**
  - Packages sent on Thursday that are delayed will probably not be delivered until Monday. UPS, Fed-Ex, and DHL do not consider Saturday to be a business day and only deliver packages marked for a special Saturday delivery (which costs about \$15-18.00 extra). If you have connections (like me) you could probably get them to deliver the package on Saturday, but if you don't then your \$300.00 shipment is going to sit in the corner of some delivery hub all weekend long. To avoid this, again, **DO NOT SHIP LATER THAN WEDNESDAY.**
- **Never insure your packages**
  - No matter how much the geckos are worth, don't waste money on insurance. Nobody, and I repeat, nobody honors insurance on live animal shipments...period.
- **Always ship as late in the day as possible**
  - Where I work, a package can be taken to the delivery terminal as late as 7:30 P.M. and still be delivered anywhere in the country by 10:30 the next morning. There is no point in putting your animal through added stress by taking it to the hub at 8:00 in the morning. It will only sit there with the rest of the boxes for 12 hours until it gets loaded onto a truck that night.
- **Fragile stickers don't cut it**
  - You need to package your animals with the intention that they will be tossed around and sat on by an elephant. I have loaded many UPS



trucks in my time and can guarantee you that at 3:30 A.M., nobody is paying attention to fragile stickers. You should definitely put them on the box, but don't think that writing "live animals, please be careful" on the outside of the package with a sharpie will make up for the fact that the box was improperly packaged.

- **Don't take your box to your local UPS Store, Postal Connection, or Kinko's**
  - All of these places are franchises and are individually owned. Although they are extremely friendly and offer great customer service benefits, none of them are allowed to take live animal shipments. You will have to go to the delivery terminal (called a "hub") to ship your animals.
- **Problems will occur so expect them and deal with them**
  - The major carriers (UPS and Fed-Ex) are reputable companies but carrier delays will happen. Next day air packages are always the highest priority and very rarely are delayed. Some reasons for delay often include, weather (check beforehand in your area and the area of delivery before you ship, also **check the weather in the cities where your carrier's primary airstrip is...in the southeast, it's Louisville for UPS and Memphis for Fed-Ex**), mishaps and miss-sortings at the hub (you can get a refund on your shipping for these), and the most common reason for delay is an error with the address...so
- **Always double, triple, and quadruple check the address before you ship**
  - Make sure that you have the right address. The best way to do this is to have the customer email you the address, send them a message back and have them confirm that the address they gave is correct and then religiously check the address fifty times as you stand in line to ship a package or just before you give it to the clerk at the counter.
- **KEEP YOUR TRACKING NUMBER**
  - If you have a problem with your shipment, you must have your tracking number. No one will be able to track your shipment by your address or the receiver or any other information you can provide. Your tracking number is your life-line.
- **Ship either UPS or Fed-Ex**
  - Don't ship through the postal service. Express mail is "supposed" to be delivered the next day, but it's not guaranteed. I wouldn't even fool with it. DHL is coming up strong on the scene in America, but I lack confidence in their express services. Ship UPS or Fed-Ex.

