

# Panther Chameleons (*Furcifer pardalis*)

## Introduction to Panther Chameleons

When Madagascar relaxed its restrictions on exporting reptiles, the Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*) was a popular export. From 1986 to 1990, more than 2,000 specimens were legally imported. Since this time, the Panther Chameleon has been bred in fairly large numbers by devoted reptile breeders and captive-hatched specimens are regularly available to hobbyists. These captive-hatched specimens are typically hardy and stress-free and make wonderful pets. They are moderately sized and come in a rainbow of different colors, making them a joy to keep. They have prehensile tails, unique eyes, unusual feet, a friendly face, and are easily handled.

There are regional variations in the coloration of Panther Chameleons from Madagascar, and these differences are most obvious in the adult males. Males from Nosy Bé tend to be a blue-green in color with patches of red and yellow on the head. Chameleons from the areas of Ankify and Ambanja are typically a vibrant blue as well, while those from Ambilobe, Antsirana, and Sambava are red, green, or orange. Chameleons from Maroantsetra, and Tamatave are often red.

The Panther Chameleon is rather large for a chameleon, varying in length from 12" to 14" in total length. These chameleons are sexually dimorphic, meaning that it is easy to tell the difference between males and females. The males have noticeable ridges on their heads which make up their ornamentation. Females, especially when gravid, remain a gray, brown, pale orange, or faint green in color with non-distinct lateral stripes and vertical bars. When receptive to male courtship, their colors change to announce their receptiveness to the male's advances.

## Housing Panther Chameleons

Panther Chameleons are more active than many chameleons and should be provided with branches, vines, and plants for climbing. A minimum cage size of 18" x 18" x 24" tall is ideal for an adult Panther Chameleon. Three sides of the cage should be opaque so that the chameleon cannot see out. Chameleons will scratch at the sides and front of the transparent walls of glass terrariums, a behavior that can quickly lead to stress.

Once you have your enclosure, a mix of sand and peat is a commonly used substrate. A top layer of shredded coconut fiber or shredded cypress mulch works well and helps keep humidity levels up.

The preferred range of temperatures for Panther Chameleons is between 76° and 82° F. The humidity should be maintained at around 60%. The chameleons need UV-B exposure daily, as well as heat from a basking light at one end of the cage. Exposure to UV-B can be provided through fluorescent light for 5-6 hours a day. The basking light should provide temperatures within the accepted range and not create temperatures that are too hot within the enclosure. Make sure there is a branch under the basking light, this branch will allow the chameleon to get close to and move away from the heat source.

The substrate should be kept moist, but not soggy. If it is kept too wet, it can easily grow mold. When the animal defecates, it can be scooped out of the cage. The substrate should be changed every three to four months or as needed.

The water bowl can be used to help humidify the cage. Placing the water bowl on top of a heat mat will help produce more humidity within the cage. If your humidity is not quite up to 50-60%, mist the enclosure, especially the leaves of the plants inside, daily. If the humidity is still too low, a humidifier might be necessary.

Panther Chameleons do best when kept individually in moderately sized (18" x 18" x 24" to 18" x 18" x 36") enclosures. Males cannot be kept together as they will fight aggressively. It is not even a good idea to have males in the same area as even the sight of another male can cause stress. There is some controversy about males and females being kept together. Sometimes, even being within sight of a male will stress the female to the point of not eating. She could even starve to death, often even refusing to be force fed. Females can usually be kept together, and juveniles can be kept with others of their same age. For breeding purposes, a male can be established in a larger cage (24" x 24" x 48" or larger) and the female can be introduced for breeding and then removed.

## Feeding Panther Chameleons

Panther Chameleons feed on commercially available prey items, including crickets, roaches, mealworms, waxworms, and even newborn mice. Waxworms and mice should be fed sparingly, as diets with too many of these delicacies have been found to lead to gout.

Adult Panther Chameleons need to be fed two or three crickets or roaches each day or a few more every other day. Other invertebrate prey items can be offered to add some variety to the diet. The water dish should be refreshed daily or as needed.

As with most lizards, you need to supplement the food sources by gut loading your crickets and roaches with fresh fruit, vegetables, fish flakes, and any of the commercially available diets. In addition to gut loading, you can dust the crickets with a mixture of 1/3 calcium and 2/3 vitamin powder every few times you feed. You can also put these powdered supplements in a dish with the waxworms and mealworms.

To avoid the work of dusting and gutloading simply use a combination of Timberline Vita-Bug® feeder insects along with Timberline CalciWorms®.



This care sheet is brought to you by the Live Food experts at Timberline. For more information on this or other animals, visit [www.timberlinefresh.com](http://www.timberlinefresh.com) or call us at 800.423.2248. Vita-Bugs® and CalciWorms® are registered trademarks of Timberline Fisheries Corp.

## Watering Panther Chameleons

Though they will get most of their water from drinking droplets off of leaves and branches in their enclosure, a bowl of fresh water should be kept available at all times.

