



Gold Dust Day Geckos

Phelsuma laticauda

INTERMEDIATE · DISPLAY ONLY · 4-6 IN ADULT · 8-12 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · MADAGASCAR

Small, fast, and awake before you are. Gold dust day geckos are Madagascan rainforest lizards that live their whole lives vertical, working the sunlit side of a trunk. They are also a display animal in the strict sense: the skin is fine enough to tear under a grabbing hand. Keep one the way you'd keep a reef tank. Build it right, then watch it work.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Ambient temp	78–85 °F
Basking spot	88–92 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	5.0 T5, 10–12 in, required
Diet	Insects, fruit nectar, CGD
Feeding	Every 2 days
Adult size	4–6 inches
Lifespan	8–12 years



Gold flecking over the neck and shoulders gives the species its name. Captive-bred *Phelsuma laticauda* fill vendor tables at NARBC shows. Photo: cello caruso-turiello / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

A Gecko You Watch, Not Handle

Bold, restless, and completely unbothered by an audience, this is one of the most watchable lizards in the hobby. It's also one of the most fragile. *Phelsuma* skin tears away in patches when a gecko is grabbed, and a startled one will drop its tail or bolt through an open door. **Never close your hand around one: cup or herd it into a container instead.** This is an animal kids can love from the other side of the glass.

02

Housing: Think Up, Not Across

Everything about this gecko points upward. Height beats floor space at every stage, so a front-opening 18×18×24 does more for an adult than a long tank twice its volume. Screen or hybrid tops keep air moving, since stagnant humid air breeds respiratory trouble. Racks are out at every age. Two in one enclosure is where it goes wrong. Males fight, a mismatched pair means chases and torn skin, and the loser hides all day and thins out. One gecko per enclosure never fails.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	6×6×12	8×8×12	Smaller than <i>P. grandis</i> ; 8×8×12 carries a hatchling for its first months.
Juvenile	8×8×12	12×12×18	Feeder insects stay tiny: no cricket wider than the gecko's head.
Subadult	12×12×18	18×18×24	Two males will fight, and torn skin follows. Solo is the safe default.
Adult	12×12×18	18×18×24	About 5 inches, still vertical. UVB is required, not a bonus.

Enclosure sizes are Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Every stage is vertical, and none of them belongs in a rack.

03

Heat, Light, and UVB

Run the enclosure 78–85 °F ambient with a basking surface at 88–92 °F near the top, and let it fall to 72–76 °F at night. That night drop is part of the care, not a failure. A 5.0 T5 is required, not optional: these are diurnal baskers that stack sunlight into bone. Mount it above the screen and set the basking perch 10 to 12 inches under the tube. Glass and plastic block UVB outright and mesh cuts a quarter to a half, so screen is all that belongs in the path. Replace the bulb on schedule.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold humidity at 50–70%, which in practice means a heavy morning misting that dries back through the day. Day geckos drink droplets off leaves and glass more than they use a bowl, so the misting is the real water source. Keep a shallow dish anyway and change it daily. Wet the plants and the back wall, then let the enclosure breathe until it dries by evening. Constant damp with no airflow is worse for them than a few dry hours.

05

Substrate, Plants, and Perches

Plant it. A bioactive mix of topsoil, coco fiber, and leaf litter holds moisture and supports live pothos, sansevieria, and bromeliads, which double as sight breaks and drinking surfaces. Give the gecko bamboo or cork verticals to sleep in and a flat basking perch under the lamp. Broad leaves catch mist; hollow bamboo gives a nervous animal somewhere to vanish. A well-planted 12×12×18 outperforms a bare 18×18×24 every time.

06

Insects and Nectar

Omnivores, fed every 2 days: insects one feeding, fruit nectar or a crested gecko diet mix the next. Keep prey small. Nothing wider than the gecko's head, which for a hatchling means pinheads and flightless fruit flies. Dust insects with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus, at nearly every insect feeding, then a multivitamin weekly while growing and twice monthly once adult. Working UVB supplies the D3, so don't stack a second source. Serve the CGD in a ledge cup up in the branches.

07

Health Red Flags

A day gecko that lets you get close is telling you something. Lethargy in a normally frantic animal is the first flag, alongside a dull, dark color and no interest in basking. Then watch the skeleton: a rubbery or kinked jaw, trembling limbs, or a gecko that can't grip glass points to metabolic bone disease, which usually means the UVB or the calcium failed. Stuck shed on the toes costs digits. Any of it is a reptile vet visit, not a wait-and-see.

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.