



Moorish Geckos

Tarentola mauritanica

BEGINNER · 5-6 IN ADULT · 8-12 YR LIFESPAN · NOCTURNAL, DAY BASKER · MEDITERRANEAN

Most geckos meet a keeper by vanishing. This one stares back. The Moorish gecko is the stout, gravel-skinned wall lizard of Mediterranean scrubland and rocky coasts, and it spends its evenings out in the open where you can actually watch it. Hardy, bold, cheap to feed. The honest headline is that it is a display animal, not a lap animal: fast, and quick to drop its tail if you grab it.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Beginner
Ambient temp	75–85 °F (65–72 °F night)
Basking spot	88–92 °F
Humidity	40–60%
UVB	Low level, beneficial
Diet	Crickets, moths, flies
Feeding	Every 1–2 days
Adult size	5–6 inches
Lifespan	8–12 years



Moorish geckos wear rows of raised tubercles like gravel set in skin. Uncommon in US collections, so ask at the NARBC gecko tables.

Photo: Kolfor / Wikimedia Commons · CC BY 3.0

01

Bold, But Not a Handling Gecko

Most small geckos treat a keeper as a predator. Moorish geckos treat you as scenery, sitting out on a rock face to watch you back. That confidence isn't tameness. They're fast, they run for any gap, and a grabbed tail comes off in your hand and regrows shorter and blunter. Handle only to move or examine the animal, and herd it into a cup rather than chase it. They're uncommon in US collections, so hobby care here leans on close relatives and European keepers.

02

Housing, Floor to Ceiling

Everything about this gecko points up. It's semi-arboreal, so height beats floor space. Cork bark slabs, stacked slate and a tall background give it the rock faces it works in the wild. Latch the lid and mean it. This species has naturalized in parts of the southern US and Europe, so an escape is more than an inconvenience, and nothing is ever released. **Never house two males together.** They're territorial, and the loser pays in toes and tail. One to an enclosure is the safe default.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	8×8×12	12×12×18	Hardy from the start. Build up, not out: height beats floor space.
Juvenile	12×12×18	18×18×24	Tolerates a seasonal cool period well, but the basking site stays on.
Subadult	18×18×24	18×18×24	Semi-arboreal: works rock faces and flat walls, so offer both.
Adult	18×18×24	24×18×24	Tops out near 6 inches. Naturalized in parts of the US, so latch the lid.

Enclosure sizes in inches, width × depth × height, from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Vertical space is the priority at every stage.

03

Heat, Light and a Basking Rock

Night-active does not mean heat-averse. Wild Moorish geckos press themselves flat on sun-warmed stone during the day, so give them a proper basking site of 88–92 °F on the surface, under an overhead bulb, with the rest of the enclosure at 75–85 °F. Let it fall to 65–72 °F overnight; that drop is part of the animal's day, not a fault. Low-output UVB is beneficial here, mounted so a basking gecko sits in it. Heat rocks burn from underneath. Skip them.

04

Dry Air, One Damp Corner

Aim for 40–60%, which is close to where most homes already sit. That range is the point. This is a dry-coast animal, and a permanently wet enclosure gets you skin and respiratory problems, not comfort. Keep a shallow water dish topped up, and mist one corner in the evening; geckos often drink droplets off stone and glass rather than standing water. Add one damp hide, a cork tube over moist moss, and shed trouble mostly stops before it starts.

05

Substrate and Climbing Furniture

Build the walls first. Cork flats, slate and stacked stone give the crevices this gecko wedges into by day, and anything stacked must be siliconed or seated on the base, not resting on shifting substrate. A packed topsoil and play sand blend holds its shape. Skip loose dry sand, especially with hatchlings: a mouthful chasing a cricket ends in an impacted gut. A few dry-tolerant plants finish it. Vary the heights, because a gecko given a choice of warm ledges uses more than one.

06

Feeding and Supplements

Crickets, moths and flies, offered every 1–2 days. Nothing wider than the space between the gecko's eyes, fed at dusk when it wakes. Gut-load the insects for a day; a cricket raised on cardboard feeds nobody. Dust plain calcium, no D3 or phosphorus, at most feedings; a multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly as an adult. With no UVB lamp, a D3 calcium twice a week replaces the plain powder. Metabolic bone disease kills quietly, and it comes down to supplements and light, not bad luck.

07

Health Red Flags

The first sign of trouble is usually a gecko that stops climbing. Weak grip, tremors, a jaw that looks soft or slightly out of line: that's metabolic bone disease, and it needs calcium, UVB and a vet. Check the toes and tail tip after each shed, because a ring of stuck skin will strangle a digit off in days. A thinning tail base, open-mouth breathing or unhealed mouth sores mean a reptile vet now, not next week.

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.