



Satanic Leaf-Tailed Geckos

Uroplatus phantasticus

ADVANCED · 3–4 IN ADULT · 5–10 YR · NOCTURNAL · EASTERN MADAGASCAR · CITES II

There is no better mimic in the gecko world. *Uroplatus phantasticus* is a three-inch scrap of Madagascar rainforest that learned to be a dead leaf, and it does the job so well you can lose it in an enclosure you planted yourself. The honest headline: this is an advanced, look-don't-touch animal. It is tiny, fragile and stress-sensitive, and it wants a cool, wet, heavily planted world most keepers cannot hold.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Advanced, display only
Adult size	3–4 inches
Lifespan	5–10 years
Ambient temp	72–78 °F
Warm spot	80–84 °F
Night temp	68–72 °F
Humidity	75–95%
UVB	Low UVB is beneficial
Diet	Small insects, every 2–3 days



Uroplatus phantasticus is built like a dead leaf, right down to the tail. Captive-bred animals appear at NARBC specialist tables.

Photo: Julien Renoult / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Hands Off, Eyes On

Everything about this gecko says do not touch. It is three to four inches of skin, bone and bluff, and a startled animal can drop from your fingers and hurt itself on the way down. **Treat it as a display animal: intervene only to move it, low and over something soft.** Sourcing matters too. *Uroplatus* is CITES Appendix II, so paperwork follows the animal across borders; buy captive-bred, and ask the seller to prove it.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Go up, not out. Every stage in the table below wants a vertical, planted cage, and none belong in a rack. Adults live in 12×12×18 at minimum and do better in 18×18×24. Hatchlings start at 6×6×12 so they can find their food. Screen or hybrid tops keep air moving, which this species needs as much as moisture. Check the seals twice, because a three-inch gecko finds gaps you cannot see. House them one to a cage: males fight, and a stressed leaf-tail stops eating long before it looks thin.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	6×6×12	8×8×12	Tiny and fragile. Fruit flies only at first; hold humidity above 80%.
Juvenile	8×8×12	12×12×18	Cool nights are essential; a drop toward 65 °F pays off long term.
Subadult	12×12×18	12×12×18	Slow growers. Expect 12–18 months from hatching to adult size.
Adult	12×12×18	18×18×24	Cool, humid, heavily planted. Live plants essential; a hands-off species.

Enclosure sizes in inches (width × depth × height), from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Every stage is vertical, and none suit a rack system.

03

Cool Room, Weak Light

This is a montane gecko, and heat kills it faster than cold does. Hold the cage at 72–78 °F. The warmest corner tops out at 80–84 °F, and that number is a ceiling, not a target: cool the room before you ever add a lamp. Heat rocks have no place here. Nights count as much as days. Let the cage fall to 68–72 °F, and a dip toward 65 °F pays off over years. Low UVB helps even a night animal, so run a weak tube over deep shade.

04

Wet Nights, Drying Days

Target 75–95% humidity, with hatchlings held at the wet end, above 80%. Get there with heavy evening mistings rather than a sealed box; the cage should climb toward 95% after dark and drift down again by morning. Stale, permanently soaked air is how leaf-tails get sick. They drink running droplets, so mist the leaves and glass and let a fine spray fall past them. A shallow dish adds humidity, but it is not how they drink. Reverse-osmosis or distilled water keeps the glass clear.

05

Plant It Like Madagascar

Live plants are not decoration here. They are the enclosure. Build on a draining soil mix, plant it thickly with pothos, ferns and small bromeliads, and cover the floor in leaf litter. Bioactive is close to mandatory, because springtails and isopods handle the mess a permanently damp cage makes, and the gecko eats the overflow. Give it thin branches and twigs to hang from, sized to a three-inch animal. Then leave it alone. Sit still after dark and you will watch a dead leaf go hunting.

06

Small Prey, Often

Feed every 2–3 days, at night, and keep the prey small. Adults take small crickets, roaches, moths and the occasional snail; hatchlings start on fruit flies alone and move up slowly. Isopods from the cleanup crew count as food. Dust with calcium and a multivitamin on a schedule you actually keep. Offer a few insects at a time and pull anything uneaten by morning, because loose crickets chew on sleeping geckos. Growth is slow: expect 12–18 months to reach adult size at 3–4 inches.

07

Health Red Flags

Dehydration and heat are the two that kill quickly. Watch for skin that stays wrinkled after a misting, sunken eyes, and a gecko sitting out in the open by day instead of pressed flat and hidden. Panting or open-mouth breathing in a damp cage means stale air and a starting respiratory infection. Stuck shed on toes and eyes counts too. Check your thermometer first, then call a reptile vet the same day. An animal this small has almost no reserve.

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.