



Schneider's Skinks

Eumeces schneiderii

BEGINNER · 12–16 IN ADULT · 15–20 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

Ask a room of keepers to name a good beginner lizard and nobody says Schneider's skink. They should. Also called the golden skink, it's a big, glossy, orange-flecked animal from the arid country of North Africa and the Middle East, calm by nature and built like a small bulldozer. It's also a burrower. Give it deep substrate and half its life happens out of sight; that's the trade, and it's a fair one.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient temp	80–88 °F
Basking spot	95–100 °F
Night temp	70–75 °F
Humidity	30–50%
UVB	Recommended
Diet	Omnivore: insects, fruit, greens
Feeding	Every 2–3 days
Adult size	12–16 inches
Lifespan	15–20 years



Captive-bred Schneider's skinks reach NARBC tables in smaller numbers than leopard geckos, which says more about fashion than difficulty.

Photo: Alexander A. Fomichev / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

A Digger You Can Handle

Schneider's skinks are large, robust lizards with an unusually even temper. Started young and handled in short, regular sessions, most settle into being picked up without much drama; an adult that never got that start may never get there. Support the whole body and let the animal walk hand to hand instead of gripping it. Never grab or hold one by the tail, because a frightened skink drops it to escape. And if it's buried, leave it buried: a skink under the sand is doing its job.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space is the whole game. These are horizontal animals that pace and dig, so length and width beat height at every stage. Hatchlings start at 18×12×12; an adult wants 48×18×18 as a floor, with 48×24×18 the better answer. A rack is a stopgap for a young animal at best, and a subadult needs a proper enclosure with basking height and a deep substrate bed. House one skink per enclosure: adults are territorial with their own kind, and they settle disputes by biting.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	18×12×12	24×18×12	Sand and soil mix deep enough to burrow; horizontal floor space.
Juvenile	24×18×12	36×18×12	Hardy and fast-growing; upsize before they outgrow the footprint.
Subadult	36×18×18	48×18×18	Adapts to handling well if started young. Too big for a rack now.
Adult	48×18×18	48×24×18	Deep sand bed, UVB, high basking. Floor space beats height.

Enclosure sizes from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Minimums are floors, not targets, and every stage wants length over height.

03

Heat & Light

Build the gradient along the long axis: 80–88 °F ambient, a basking surface at 95–100 °F, and a night drop to 70–75 °F. Use overhead heat, a halogen flood aimed at a flat stone, so the animal warms its back the way the sun does it. **Never use a heat rock.** A burrowing skink will settle onto one and cook its belly before it registers the burn. UVB is recommended here. Glass blocks it outright and mesh cuts it, so mount the tube over an open screen top.

04

Humidity & Water

Arid does not mean bone dry. Hold the enclosure at 30–50% and let it swing inside that band rather than chasing one number. A shallow water dish stays in permanently; these skinks drink and will sit in it when they feel like it. The piece keepers skip is the humid hide, a covered box of damp moss or damp substrate at the cool end, topped up as it dries. That is where a skink goes to shed cleanly.

05

Substrate and Digging

Depth matters more than brand. You want a topsoil and play-sand mix, damp underneath and packed, deep enough that a tunnel holds instead of caving in. Skip loose dry sand at every age; skinks swallow grit chasing insects across it, and the young ones are worst hit, so feed hatchlings and juveniles from a shallow dish. Then furnish the top: a flat basking stone, a hide at each end, a slab of cork to break up the floor. A bare surface gives a digger nothing to work with.

06

Feeding

Omnivore, and they mean it. The base is insects, gut-loaded crickets, dubia roaches, the odd hornworm, offered every 2–3 days, with fruit and some greens alongside. Dust the insects with plain calcium, no D3 or phosphorus, at most feedings, and a reptile multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly as an adult. With no UVB lamp running, a D3 calcium replaces the plain powder twice a week. Watch the animal, not the bowl: these skinks have no brakes, and a fat skink is a slow skink.

07

Health Red Flags

A skink that stops digging is telling you something. Watch for one that will not leave the warm end, refuses food for over a week, or strains without passing stool: that pattern points at impaction. Twitching limbs, a rubbery jaw, or legs that shake under the animal's own weight are early metabolic bone disease, almost always a UVB or calcium failure. Check toes and tail tip after every shed for tight rings of skin. Any of it, book a reptile vet.

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.