



Veiled Chameleons

Chamaeleo calyptratus

ADVANCED · 14–24 IN ADULT · 5–8 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · YEMEN & SAUDI ARABIA

The veiled chameleon is the toughest member of a delicate family, the one chameleon with real margin for a dedicated first-timer. Males push two feet counting the tail, wear a towering casque, and live 5–8 years on good husbandry. The species is display-only, opinionated, and runs on three systems that must all work: airflow, ultraviolet light, and dripping water.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	72–80 °F
Basking surface	85–95 °F
Night	65–70 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	12% T5 required, Zone 3–4
Diet	Insects + some greens
Feeding cadence	Daily; adults every other day
Adult size	14–24 in
Lifespan	5–8 years



Veiled chameleon. The casque isn't decoration: it channels dew toward the mouth.

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01

Temperament: look, don't touch

A veiled chameleon is a territorial hermit that regards your hand as a large predator. Some individuals mellow into cup-fed tolerance; none enjoy being held, and chronic handling stress shortens chameleon lives. Set the enclosure up as theater (they are mesmerizing hunters) and keep interactions to feeding. One chameleon per cage, out of sight of any other.

02

Housing: screen, tall, planted

Airflow is survival equipment: full-screen enclosures are the standard because stagnant moist air in glass boxes gives chameleons respiratory infections. Build vertical with a network of vines and horizontal perches at every level, dense pothos and ficus for cover, and a bare or simply-covered floor for easy cleaning.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	16×16×20	16×16×30	Screen standard; fruit flies and pinhead crickets.
Juvenile	18×18×36	24×24×48	Upgrade fast: growth outruns the cage.
Subadult	24×24×48	24×24×48	Never cohabitate; not even a 'bonded pair.'
Adult	24×24×48	36×24×72	2×2×4 ft screen is the floor; bigger is visibly better.

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H. Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

Heat & UVB

A basking perch 6–8 inches under the heat lamp reading 85–95 °F, ambient in the 70s, and a real night drop into the 60s with everything off. They expect it. UVB is a separate fixture: a linear 12% T5 tube sitting on the screen top, with the highest perch 12–18 inches below it, which puts this Ferguson Zone 3 species near UVI 3. Never closer than 10 inches; at 6 inches the same tube burns eyes and skin. Glass blocks UVB entirely, so a sunny window is not a substitute.

04

Water: drips, not dishes

Chameleons don't recognize standing water; they drink droplets rolling off leaves. Automated misting two or more times daily plus a slow dripper over foliage is the working setup. Hand-spraying works if you're honest about consistency. Check hydration by the urates in droppings: white is right, orange means increase water now.

05

Planting & the egg question

Live plants (pothos, ficus, schefflera) hold humidity and calm the animal. Veileds also nibble foliage, so everything planted must be nontoxic. And plan for biology: females develop and lay eggs **without ever meeting a male**. Every female enclosure needs a lay bin of 8+ inches of moist, diggable sand-soil from six months old; an egg-bound female with nowhere to dig is a fatal emergency.

06

Feeding

Gut-loaded crickets and roaches are the backbone: daily for growing juveniles, every other day for adults. Rotate in hornworms and silkworms, with waxworms as rare treats. Dust with plain calcium most feedings, and a multivitamin with D3 on a twice-monthly cadence. Thirsty, hungry feeders teach chameleons nothing; gut-loading is where the nutrition actually happens.

07

Health Red Flags

Sunken, closed eyes are the chameleon alarm bell. Usually dehydration, always serious. Bowed legs, a soft casque or grip weakness is MBD. Gaping with mucus sounds means respiratory infection from cool, still air. A female digging restlessly or straining is egg-bound: vet, today. Dark, dull color all day long is a stress or temperature message, not a mood.

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.