



Viper Geckos

Hemidactylus imbricatus

INTERMEDIATE · 3–4 IN ADULT · 8–12 YR LIFESPAN · NOCTURNAL · INDIA & PAKISTAN

Three to four inches, fully grown. Viper geckos are miniature desert lizards from the arid rock and scrub of India and Pakistan, wrapped in the keeled, overlapping scales that give them their name. They are hardy once the setup is right, and that is the honest catch: an animal this small has no margin, so small mistakes are not small. This is a species you watch, not one you handle.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	3–4 inches
Lifespan	8–12 years
Ambient temp	80–90 °F
Basking spot	90–95 °F
Night drop	65–70 °F
Humidity	40–60%
UVB	Low UVB beneficial
Feeding	Micro prey every 2–3 days



Captive-bred viper geckos show up on gecko tables at NARBC shows. The keeled, overlapping scales are the species' signature.

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01

Tiny, Quick, Nocturnal

Viper geckos are hardy captives with an unusual build: keeled, overlapping scales and a fat-storing tail that doubles as a condition gauge. The intermediate rating is not about temper; it is about size. They are quick, they are small enough to vanish into a room, and the tail drops if you grab for one. Handle only when husbandry requires it, low over a table and in a closed room. Otherwise watch them at night, which is when they work.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space beats height: these are ground and crevice animals, so every stage runs horizontal. A 12×12×12 holds one adult; 18×12×12 is better. They rack well at every stage. Escape-proof it first, because a hatchling under an inch fits through gaps you would call sealed. House them singly by default. Groups are possible in the largest footprint with only one male, but two males will fight, and in a group this small the loser stops eating long before you notice.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	6×6×6	8×8×8	Under an inch at hatch; deli cups are the standard grow-out.
Juvenile	8×8×8	12×8×8	Stays small for life; floor space matters more than height.
Subadult	12×8×8	12×12×12	Small, docile desert species; rack-compatible at every stage.
Adult	12×12×12	18×12×12	Miniature desert gecko, about 3 inches; keep the layout horizontal.

Minimums and preferred footprints from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance; inches, width × depth × height.

03

Heat, Light and the Night Drop

Run a gradient: 80–90 °F ambient, a 90–95 °F basking surface at the warm end, and nights falling to 65–70 °F. That drop is part of the care, not a failure. **Every heat source runs through a thermostat**, and heat rocks stay out of the enclosure entirely, since a box this small overheats in minutes. Low UVB is beneficial even for a nocturnal gecko, mounted so the animal can pick shade under rock or cork.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold 40–60% humidity. Desert species does not mean bone dry, and it does not mean a rainforest either. A water dish changed daily plus one humid hide packed with damp moss covers both ends of that range. Keep the dish shallow or drop in pebbles, because a three-inch gecko can drown in a deep one. Mist one corner lightly at night if the room runs dry. Bad shed on the toes and tail tip means the box has gone too arid.

05

Substrate and Furniture

Hatchlings and juveniles go on paper towel, not loose sand; at that size, swallowed grit is a real impaction risk. Grown geckos do well on a packed sand and soil blend deep enough to hold a shallow burrow. Then build up: flat stone seated on the base so nothing can shift, cork bark slabs, and narrow gaps between them. They are crevice animals, so give them more tight hides than you think they need, on both the warm and cool ends.

06

Feeding

Everything they eat is micro prey: fruit flies, pinhead crickets and small mealworms, offered every 2–3 days. Nothing wider than the space between the eyes. Dust with calcium and rotate in a multivitamin on the label's schedule, because a gecko this small banks almost nothing against a bad week. The tail is the fuel tank: a full one is wide and firm, and it thins long before the ribs show. Pull uneaten crickets out; they chew on a sleeping gecko.

07

Health Red Flags

The tail tells you first. A tail that goes from firm to flat over a couple of weeks means the animal is not eating or not digesting, and at this size that is urgent. Watch also for retained shed ringing the toes, which costs digits, for wrinkled skin and sunken eyes, which is dehydration, and for a nocturnal gecko sitting out in the open through the day. A thinning tail plus refused food is a reptile-vet call, 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.