

# Veiled Chameleon

## Care Guide for New Owners

Veiled Chameleon

Reptile

Intermediate Level

Territorial

### Quick Facts at a Glance

<b>Species</b>	Chamaeleo calytratus
<b>Lifespan</b>	Males: 5 to 8 years; Females: 3 to 5 years
<b>Adult Size</b>	Males: 14 to 24 inches including casque; Females: 10 to 14 inches
<b>Activity Cycle</b>	Diurnal; active during the day
<b>Temperament</b>	Can be defensive and territorial; males especially can become nippy
<b>Enclosure</b>	Minimum 24x24x48 inches tall for adults; screen enclosure required
<b>Basking Temp</b>	85 to 95 degrees F basking spot
<b>Ambient Temp</b>	75 to 85 degrees F warm; 65 to 75 degrees F cool side
<b>Nighttime Temp</b>	60 to 68 degrees F; nighttime drop important
<b>Humidity</b>	30 to 50 percent ambient; 80 to 100 percent during misting
<b>UVB</b>	T5 HO UVB required; Ferguson Zone 3
<b>Legal Status</b>	Legal in Wisconsin; verify local ordinances

### Meet the Veiled Chameleon

Veiled chameleons are the most widely available and commonly kept chameleon species in captivity. Their striking casque (the tall bony crest on the top of their head), vivid color displays, and relative hardiness compared to other chameleon species have made them a staple of the reptile hobby for decades. They are more adaptable to slight husbandry variations than some other chameleons, but they are still demanding animals who require specific care.

Veiled chameleons have a reputation for being feisty. Adult males in particular can be territorial and defensive, hissing, gaping, and biting when they feel threatened or cornered. This does not mean they cannot become accustomed to handling, but it does mean they require a keeper who is patient, reads body language well, and respects the animal's signals. Forced handling of an unwilling chameleon causes chronic stress that shortens their already short lifespan.

### **Captive Breeding Has Come a Long Way**

Veiled chameleons have been bred in captivity for many generations and are one of the few chameleon species where captive-bred animals are reliably available. Always seek captive-bred veiled chameleons. Wild-caught animals are more stressed, more parasitized, and less adaptable to captivity than animals bred and raised in human care from birth.

### **Where They Come From**

Veiled chameleons (*Chamaeleo calyptratus*) are native to the Arabian Peninsula, primarily Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Unlike the lush tropical habitats of many other chameleon species, veiled chameleons come from arid mountain environments, dry riverbeds, and agricultural areas where water sources are periodic rather than constant. They are one of the more robust chameleon species precisely because of their adaptation to variable conditions.

Their casque serves a functional purpose in the wild: it channels moisture from morning dew and fog down toward their mouth, allowing them to drink in an environment where standing water may be scarce. This adaptation also means veiled chameleons obtain significant water from plant material and dew in captivity.

## Legal Considerations

Veiled chameleons are legal to own in Wisconsin. They are listed on CITES Appendix II. Captive-bred animals within the United States are not subject to import restrictions. Verify local city and county ordinances before adopting.

## Enclosures

Screen enclosures are required. Glass enclosures cause chronic respiratory infections in chameleons due to poor air circulation. The minimum enclosure for an adult male veiled chameleon is 24x24x48 inches. Larger is better. Males should never be housed together or within visual range of each other. Each chameleon must have its own completely separate enclosure.

Live plants add humidity, security, and enrichment. Pothos, ficus, schefflera, and hibiscus are popular chameleon-safe choices. Veiled chameleons will also eat some plant material, so ensure all plants are non-toxic. Branches at varying heights and angles allow the chameleon to navigate and thermoregulate throughout the enclosure.

## Temperature

### Target Temperatures

Basking spot: 85 to 95 degrees F. Males prefer the higher end; juveniles and females should stay closer to 85 degrees F.

Warm ambient: 75 to 85 degrees F.

Cool ambient: 65 to 75 degrees F.

Nighttime: 60 to 68 degrees F. A nighttime temperature drop is important for immune health.

A halogen or incandescent bulb over one end of the enclosure creates the basking spot. Use a thermostat or dimmer to regulate output. The rest of the enclosure should remain significantly cooler to allow the chameleon to choose its preferred temperature. Avoid heat rocks, heat mats, or any under-tank heating.

## UVB Lighting

Use a T5 HO UVB bulb appropriate for Zone 3 species, such as the Arcadia T5 HO 6 percent or Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0. In a screen enclosure the UV passes freely, so these output levels are appropriate. Mount the bulb at the top of the enclosure and ensure the basking zone falls within the optimal UV

range for the bulb. Replace every 6 months regardless of visible light output.

## Humidity and Hydration

Veiled chameleons require lower ambient humidity than most other chameleons, between 30 and 50 percent, but they still need misting to drink and to briefly raise humidity during the misting event. Mist twice daily. The enclosure should dry out between misting sessions. Consistently wet conditions cause respiratory infections and bacterial growth.

Like all chameleons, veiled chameleons drink from water droplets on leaves and branches rather than from standing water. Watch your chameleon drink during misting sessions to confirm hydration. A dripper system between misting sessions provides additional drinking opportunity. Sunken eyes indicate dehydration and require immediate action.

## Diet: Primarily Insectivore With Plant Material

Veiled chameleons are primarily insectivorous but also consume plant material in the wild and in captivity. Some individuals become enthusiastic plant-eaters. Offer a variety of feeder insects including dubia roaches, crickets, black soldier fly larvae, hornworms, and silkworms. Variety is important for nutritional completeness.

Safe plant material includes collard greens, dandelion greens, hibiscus leaves and flowers, and pothos leaves. The plants in the enclosure often serve as both enrichment and a food source. Avoid feeding spinach, avocado, onions, or any plant that has been treated with pesticides.

Supplement with calcium without D3 at most feedings, multivitamin every two weeks, and calcium with D3 every two weeks. Gut-load feeder insects with nutritious greens and vegetables for 24 to 48 hours before feeding.

## Egg-Laying in Female Veiled Chameleons

Female veiled chameleons lay eggs whether or not they have mated with a male. An unmated female will produce infertile clutches regularly throughout her adult life, and this reproductive output puts significant metabolic strain on the animal. Females kept at lower temperatures and fed slightly less frequently lay smaller, less frequent clutches and tend to live longer as a result.

A laying bin must always be accessible for females: a deep container (at least 12 inches deep) filled with moist sand or a sand and soil mix that the female can dig into to lay her eggs. A female that cannot find a suitable place to lay will become egg-bound, which is life-threatening. Watch for digging behavior and restlessness as signs that a female is preparing to lay.

## Common Health Issues

### Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD)

Caused by inadequate UVB or calcium. Signs include rubbery bones, tremors, difficulty gripping, and progressive weakness. Correct UVB from day one and follow a consistent supplementation schedule.

### Egg Binding (Dystocia)

A female that cannot lay her eggs develops a life-threatening condition. A laying bin must always be available. Signs include restlessness, digging behavior, prolonged straining, and lethargy. Requires immediate veterinary care.

### Respiratory Infections

Caused by poor ventilation, glass enclosures, or temperatures too low. Signs include open-mouth breathing, wheezing, and lethargy. Screen enclosures and correct temperatures prevent most cases.

### Dehydration

Sunken eyes, yellow or orange urates, and lethargy are the key signs. Increase misting and assess dripper availability immediately. Chameleon dehydration is a rapid emergency.

### Stomatitis (Mouth Rot)

Signs include swelling, cheesy discharge, and reluctance to eat. Often follows mouth injury or chronic stress. Requires veterinary treatment.

### Parasites

Common in all chameleons. Annual fecal exams are recommended. Thin, lethargic chameleons or those with abnormal stools should be seen by a vet.

## **Obesity**

Veiled chameleons are prone to obesity when fed too frequently or given too many high-fat feeders. An overweight chameleon has visible fat deposits in the casque and limbs. Feed appropriate quantities and limit waxworms and superworms.

## Things Every New Veiled Chameleon Owner Should Know

### **Screen enclosures are mandatory.**

Glass causes respiratory infections. Use a well-ventilated screen enclosure in a room with good airflow.

### **Dark colors are a communication signal.**

A veiled chameleon showing persistently dark, muted colors is stressed, cold, or ill. Bright, vivid colors indicate a healthy, content, appropriately warm animal.

### **Female reproductive cycles are metabolically costly.**

Females that are cooler and eat slightly less frequently lay smaller clutches and live longer. Overfeeding and high temperatures accelerate egg production and shorten female lifespan.

### **A laying bin is not optional for females.**

Without a suitable place to dig and lay eggs, females become egg-bound and die. Provide a deep container of moist substrate at all times.

### **Respect hissing and gaping.**

A chameleon that hisses, gapes, or turns sideways to look larger is asking to be left alone. Continuing to interact with a chameleon that is clearly stressed is harmful to the animal and increases the risk of a bite.

### **Replace UVB bulbs every 6 months.**

UV output degrades before the bulb burns out. A calendar reminder every 6 months keeps this from being forgotten.

### **Find an exotic vet with chameleon experience.**

Chameleon medicine is specialized. Locate one before you need them.

### **Questions? We're Here!**

Boggy's Buddies is always happy to answer questions and support you. Reach us at [boggysbuddies@gmail.com](mailto:boggysbuddies@gmail.com) or find us on Facebook and Instagram.