



Chameleons

Selection



Now you can own a pet, just one pet, that changes to many different colours. This colour change comes about through a combination of light, temperature, and mood of the animal.

Sounds like fun, doesn't it? That is only the beginning. Your pet chameleon can look up with one eye and down with the other.

His tail is another unusual feature. It is brittle and easily broken off. If this happens, don't worry; he will grow a new one.

A chameleon is a reptile and a member of the lizard family. He has a body about 3 inches long, four legs, a long tail, short teeth, and a layer of scales on his body.

The male chameleon has a dewlap, an extra fold of skin of his throat. When meeting another male or when in danger, the chameleon will puff out his dewlap.

All of the over 2,000 species of lizards are related and most of them live in warm regions. The chameleon, often called anoles, is sold in pet shops and is adapted to Louisiana's climate.

Given proper care, these little animals do well in captivity and become quite tame.

Facilities

A home for one or two chameleons may be a large-mouth gallon jug made into a terrarium. Add about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of coloured gravel, along with some real or artificial plants and a small rock, and punch holes in lid of jug. Keep a little flat tray (like a jar lid) of water in the terrarium.

If you prefer a home large enough for your chameleon to have playmates, such as skinks (another type of small lizard), tree frogs, or toads, you may build a larger terrarium. It may be:

- A wooden box 2 feet long and 1 foot wide with a screen or glass top. Place sand and moss in bottom of box.
- A bowl in which you plant some ferns or water plants or add real or artificial plants.

Either home will be fairly comfortable for your chameleon. Keep terrarium in a warm sunny place and temperature 75 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

If you choose to have more than one chameleon, you may let females stay together, along with one male. They should all be approximately the same size. A small chameleon with adults will not eat for fear of being attacked.

Never put two males together, regardless of size. They will always be enemies and continue to fight. If you are not certain of your chameleon's sex, place a mirror in front of it. The male will inflate his dewlap and try to attack the mirror.

Feeding

A chameleon eats little and can go without food for 2 weeks. His tongue is 4 inches long and is as long as his head and body together. He can catch a fly with his tongue at the blink of an eye.

During the summer, place a piece of fruit in the terrarium to draw insects. You can also gather insects from trees and around lights.

During the winter, you can buy grubs, mealworms or fruit flies from pet shops.

Chameleons are daytime animals and should be fed when it is light. You can teach them to eat from your hand.

Water is most important. Since they will not drink from a dish, sprinkle or spray lukewarm water on the plants in the terrarium at least once each day. Sprinkle a little water on your pet, and his skin will absorb it.

Management

Grooming

None is required.

Handling

Always handle your pet slowly and easily. Place your hand, with the fingers bent over the body and his head between two fingers. A loop made from thread and placed over his head will allow you to catch him easier. Be sure to take the strings off before placing him back in his terrarium. Lizards should be handled as little as possible. Don't carry them around with you - they are fragile.

Always wash your hands well after handling your chameleon or something in its habitat.

Exercise

None is required.

Training

The chameleon can be trained to do a number of tricks. First, you need to gain his love and confidence. Do this by leading him with a string around the room. Handle him gently so he will not be afraid.

Teach your chameleon to jump through a hoop, by coaxing him to jump to his favourite spot. He will climb a ladder with just a little coaxing or seesaw with a little help. After each performance be sure to reward him with a bite to eat.

You will be proud to show him off.

Health Care

Chameleons are relatively free of disease. About the only thing you need to be concerned with is cold temperatures. Since chameleons are cold-blooded animals, the body temperature becomes that of the surroundings. An electric light bulb will help warm the terrarium.

Usually the symptom of a cold is the lack of desire to change colour.

The larvae of a batfly might bother it. If you find one of these wormlike larvae on the body, pull it straight out with tweezers.

With proper feeding, love and correct temperature, your chameleon may live to be 5 years old.

Breeding

In June, July, or August, the female chameleon will lay two or more eggs. Eggs are either light green or light brown. The female will move the eggs in a few days under a small pile of leaves or sand. The mother's job is now complete, for after they are hatched, the babies look after themselves.

You can make an incubator from a quart jar. Fill the jar with 2 inches of sand and cover with moist moss. Punch holes in jar top. Set the jar in the sunlight and keep moss and sand moist. Eggs will hatch in 4 to 8 weeks.

Feed the baby chameleon sugar dissolved in water with an eyedropper and meat on a fine straw. After 2 weeks, the pet will be able to catch insects.

Then the baby chameleons are the size of an adult, put them in a larger terrarium. Remember, two males should never be put in the same terrarium.

Economics

Chameleons are an inexpensive pet to keep!

Project Resources:

Pinterest – The Visual Discovery Tool



Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards – Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for chameleon information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering chameleon will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example, try searching by the topic you are interested in such as "diet of chameleons".

Here are some sites that may be of interest:

<http://www.bioexpedition.com/chameleon/>

<http://www.livescience.com/51061-chameleon.html>

Sections of the Chameleon Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



Manitoba 4-H Contact Information

1129 Queens Avenue Brandon, MB R7A 1L9

Ph: (204) 726-6613 Fax: (204) 726-6260

4h@gov.mb.ca

www.manitoba.ca/agriculture/4-h

www.4h.mb.ca