

VEILED CHAMELEON CARE GUIDE

Chamaeleo calyptratus

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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Veiled chameleons are large, colorful, and impressively territorial lizards from coastal Yemen and Saudi Arabia. They are among the most popular chameleons in captivity — and among the most unforgiving of poor husbandry. Respect their requirements and they'll reward you with years of dramatic, technicolor indifference.

VITAL STATISTICS

Stat	Males	Females
Total length	17–24 in (43–61 cm)	10–18 in (25–33 cm)
Body weight	100–200 g	90–120 g
Average lifespan	4–8 years	2–4 years
Sexual maturity	6–10 months	6–10 months

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR VEILED CHAMELEON

- Veiled chameleons are display animals first, handling subjects second — they tolerate moderate interaction but do not seek it out
- They are well known for beauty, extreme territoriality, and a willingness to make their displeasure obvious
- That impressive casque on the head? Males have a taller one. It may collect dew, dissipate heat, or broadcast low-frequency buzzing — possibly all three.
- They also have prehensile tails, independently moving eyes, zygodactyl feet, and tongues longer than their bodies. They are a lot.

SEXING

Males	Females
Small “tarsal spur” on back of hind leg (present)	No tarsal spur (absent)
Taller casque height	Shorter, lower casque
Greater total body length	Smaller overall size
Distinct male color patterns	Distinct female color patterns

- The tarsal spur is the most reliable sexing method at any age — check the back of the hind leg first



HOUSING

- **Screened enclosures only** — glass aquariums trap heat and humidity and predispose chameleons to respiratory and skin infections
- **One chameleon per enclosure**, always. They are solitary and should be kept physically and visually separate.
- No substrate needed — plain plastic or glass floor, lined with paper towels changed regularly for hygiene
- Provide branches for climbing and live or artificial plants for shelter — dense enough for cover, with enough leaf surface for water droplets to form

Age	Minimum Enclosure Size
Juvenile (up to 8 months)	16" × 16" × 30" (40 × 40 × 76 cm)
Adult	24" × 24" × 48" (61 × 61 × 122 cm)



TEMPERATURE

Zone	Temperature
Warm / basking side (daytime)	85–90, bask 95–100°F (29–38°C)
Cool side (daytime)	75–80°F (22–27°C)
Nighttime minimum	Above 40–50°F (5–10°C)

- Provide heat with a basking light — **10 to 12 hours per day**
- Maintain a gradient throughout the enclosure so your chameleon can thermoregulate on its own terms
- **Never** allow direct contact with heating elements or light sources — burns are common and serious



LIGHTING

- UVB lighting: **10–12 hours daily** — artificial UVB or direct natural sunlight (not through glass)
- Natural sunlight is excellent when available — just ensure the enclosure cannot overheat
- UVB supports calcium metabolism; without it you're setting up a metabolic bone disease situation



WATER & HUMIDITY

- Veiled chameleons drink from wet surfaces, not bowls — mist the enclosure **twice daily** so droplets form on leaves and glass (40–60% day, 75–90% night)
- Also provide a drip system — anything from a simple drip cup to an automatic drip line works
- Chameleons that don't drink enough water become dehydrated quickly, which leads to severe illness. Misting is not optional.
- Enclosure should dry out between mistings — constant wet is not the goal, consistent access to droplets is



DIET

- Veiled chameleons feed primarily on **live, moving insect prey** — some also accept vegetation
- Prey items should be no longer than the width of the chameleon's head — size matters more than variety
- Gut-load all insects for at least **48 hours** before feeding — the nutritional quality of your feeder insects is the nutritional quality of your chameleon's diet
- Wild-collected insects are acceptable only if collected from a pesticide-free area
- Larger chameleons may occasionally take snails and small lizards
- For vegetation: offer mixed greens, chopped vegetables and fruits, hibiscus flowers, or ficus plants in a shallow bowl

Staple Feeder Insects	Feeding Frequency
Crickets	Juveniles: once to twice daily
Silkworms	Adults: every other day
Dubia roaches	
Mealworms	
Superworms	
Waxworms (occasional treat)	

- Offer prey in deep containers when possible — free-roaming insects can chew on chameleons and cause injury. Yes, really.



SUPPLEMENTS

- Dust insects immediately before feeding — not hours in advance

Supplement	Juveniles	Adults
Calcium carbonate (no Vitamin D3)	Daily	Every other day
Vitamins with preformed Vitamin A (retinol, not beta-carotene)	Weekly	Weekly

- Discuss a specific supplementation plan with your veterinarian — these are guidelines, not a prescription



THINGS YOUR CHAMELEON NEEDS TO AVOID

- Housing with another chameleon — even brief visual contact causes stress
- Sharp edges anywhere in the enclosure
- Free roaming the house — it will go badly
- Cats, dogs, or other predators within sight or reach
- Direct contact with heating elements or light sources
- Excessive handling — they tolerate it, they do not enjoy it
- Temperatures that are too hot or too cool — both extremes are dangerous

COMMON MEDICAL CONCERNS

Condition	Notes
Malnutrition / metabolic bone disease	From poor diet, inadequate UVB, or calcium deficiency
Dehydration	From insufficient misting or drip system — leads to severe illness
Reproductive disease / egg binding	Common in females; requires veterinary attention
Toenail loss / foot infections	Often from rough surfaces or poor hygiene
Intestinal parasites	Fecal testing at every vet visit
Respiratory / sinus / ocular infections	Often caused by poor ventilation or incorrect temperatures
Stomatitis / periodontal disease	Mouth infection — requires veterinary treatment
Hypovitaminosis A / ocular disease	From inadequate preformed vitamin A in the diet
Kidney disease	Often linked to chronic dehydration
Hemipene prolapse	Males only; veterinary emergency

- Most of these conditions are preventable with correct husbandry — which is exactly why the husbandry section exists



VETERINARY CARE

- Take all newly acquired veiled chameleons to an experienced exotic animal veterinarian for a wellness exam and fecal parasite check — before problems develop, not after
- Quarantine all new chameleons away from other reptiles for **at least 30 days**
- Keep chameleons physically and visually separate from one another at all times
- Develop a relationship with a veterinarian experienced in reptile preventive care, medicine, and surgery — find one at ARAV.org

Most reptiles, including veiled chameleons, carry *Salmonella* bacteria without appearing ill. Always wash hands thoroughly after handling your chameleon or anything in their enclosure. Veiled chameleons are not recommended for very young children or individuals with compromised immune systems.



SIGNS OF A HEALTHY VEILED CHAMELEON

- Bright, responsive body colors
- Eyes open, clear, and tracking independently
- Mouth free of excessive mucus
- Tongue retracts fully into the mouth
- No missing toenails or toe swelling
- Good foot grip strength on branches
- Skin clean with no excessive retained shed

- Tail curls with strength and control
- Active and alert demeanor

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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