What is the best pet lizard?

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What is the best pet lizard? What lizard is most handleable? Which lizard is the best for children? In this article we will answer these questions with our top 5 pet lizard species –

- These leopards don’t climb

Leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*) are a small, stocky terrestrial species of gecko found throughout southeast Afghanistan, western India, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran (this also includes a subspecies – The Montanus leopard gecko). Leopard geckos inhabit arid areas including semidesert environments and dry scrubland which are filled with loose, sandy gravel, rock outcrops, coarse grasses and hard packed clays. The leopard geckos spotty, bumpy skin reflects this harsh environment, allowing for excellent camouflage. A crepuscular species, leopard geckos are mostly active during the early morning and early evening when temperatures allow it. Wild specimens will seek shelter from extreme temperatures and have been known to brumate during the colder months (with temperatures dropping as low as 5°C) and even become dormant during the hottest part of the year where temperatures can exceed 40°C. Leopard geckos and their relatives (fat tailed geckos, the American banded geckos and the largest member of the family, the dusky gecko) are the only gecko species to have moveable eyelids. In all other gecko species, the eyelid is fused into an immovable transparent cap known as a spectacle. Uniquely to the leopard gecko and its close relatives, they are lacking adhesive foot pads (lamellae) that allow other members of the family to scale walls and ceilings. It is generally believed that leopard geckos lost their lamellae due to the climate they inhabit, with microscopic grooves and hairs not being effective in a dry and dusty environment. A leopard geckos’ ears are also one of their more peculiar features. Due to the placement on the head, if you look at just the right angle, you can see straight through to the other side. Leopard geckos do make incredibly good pets, their vacant smile is very adhering, they handle well and become accustomed to their keepers almost becoming friendly.

- Crested climbers

The crested gecko (*Correlophus ciliatus*) is a small sized, arboreal, crepuscular lizard found exclusively in the subtropical forests of southern New Caledonia. They range in size from 4 - 7inches, half of which can be the length of the tail. The toes and the underside tip of the semi-prehensile tail are covered in fine hairs called setae. Recent research has found that crested geckos can adhere to almost any surface (including glass) as a result of a weak electrical phenomenon known as Van der Waals forces. These hairs help the gecko to grip onto moist surfaces, the toes are also tipped by a small claw that aids in grip if the setae cannot find purchase. Crested geckos can also drop their tails (caudal autonomy) as a distraction to predators, but unlike some of their gecko cousins, a crested gecko's tail will not regrow. This is not as detrimental to a crested gecko as it would be for a leopard gecko as crested gecko tails are used for climbing, not fat storage. The majority of wild adult crested geckos (approximately 75%) are tailless, having lost it through either predation attempts or through breeding. The crested gecko has no eyelids and instead has a transparent scale called a spectacle. This protective scale keeps the eye moist and is cleaned manually with the crested gecko's tongue (sounds terrible but is actually adorable). A mostly arboreal species, crested geckos can be found from 2-10 metres off the ground and inhabiting the lower canopy of new Caledonian forests. Due to their natural crepuscular behaviour, crested geckos will sleep through the majority of the day, hidden in hollow branches or camouflaged in the canopy, emerging at dusk and dawn to feed. Another excellent species of gecko that tolerates handling very well. Lively and manageable, cresties make great pets for almost anyone.

- Dragon Fire

The central Bearded dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) is a medium sized semi-arboreal agamid lizard found in central Australia. They can grow as long as 24" in length and reach upwards of 700 grams in weight. Bearded dragons have long sharp claws that are used for climbing and digging and a large triangular shaped head with a wide jaw evolved for an omnivorous diet. Beardies will eat almost anything in their natural environment. Vegetation and greens, including cacti and flowers. Cockroaches and grasshoppers, and not forgetting, venomous spiders and scorpions. They've even been recorded tangling with small snakes and large centipedes. Beardies also have a hidden super power – they have a third eye. Much like other members of the Agamid family, beardies have a pineal eye on the top of their head. This is a photoreceptor that, in adult animals, is covered by a scale and can detect light and shadow, working as an early alarm system for potential predators. Bearded dragons are a diurnal species of lizard and are true sun worshippers, they bask in the sun until they

reach their optimal temperature, and they become active and start searching for food. They can be seen in their native Australia during the day, basking on fence posts, fallen trees, rocky outcrops and even park benches in some areas. If the heat gets too intense, they will retreat to a shaded area or, in extreme circumstances, dig a burrow to retreat from the heat. Bearded dragons get their name because of the spiky throat pouch, often referred to as a "beard," that they possess. This beard can inflate and darken in colour, particularly when the dragon feels threatened, excited, or is displaying dominance. They also possess dozens of spikes around their body, this reptilian armour earning them the “dragon” mantle. Beardies have been a firm favourite in the reptile hobby for more than 30 years, handleable, manageable, and in some cases, with the ability to be trained. These amazing reptiles are a contender for the most popular pet reptile in the world.

- Tongue tied

Chameleons. So many different shapes and sizes found across Africa, Asia, Europe and the island of Madagascar, chameleons have been a staple of the reptile hobby since the 1800’s and in the 1970’s is when the chameleon came into its own in the pet trade. A truly fascinating family, chameleons are iconic for their rotating eyes that move independently of each other, their extendable tongues that can be twice the length of their body and accelerate from 0-60mph in 1/100th of a second and the chromatophores found in their skin that can change their perceived colour. With more than 200 recognised species of chameleon currently known, the largest, the Parson’s chameleon (*Calumma parsonii*) can grow to an impressive 28” in length, the same size as a medium suitcase, while the smallest, the aptly named nano-chameleon (*Brookesia nano*) reaches a mere 2.2cm, approximately the same size as sunflower seed. Some of the most popular species of chameleon found in the reptile hobby today are

- Panther chameleons (*Furcifer pardalis*)
- Yemen chameleon (*Chamaeleo calyptratus*)
- Jacksons chameleon (*Trioceros jacksonii*)

These species are some of the most iconic, from the vivid colours of the panther, the body shape and domed head of the Yemen, to the spiked horns protruding from the face of the Jacksons. When you think of a chameleon, you see one of these species. While they don’t make a very handleable animal, they can make a wonderful enriching pet. Some chameleon enclosures look like a slice of the forests and jungles they originate from. With the addition of foggers and misters, chameleon housing looks

more like living works of art than a cold and sterile vivarium.

- Girl Power

Mourning geckos (*Lepidodactylus lugubris*) are a parthenogenetic species of gecko that originates from the Pacific region and coastal areas of the Indian Ocean. Mourning geckos are small lizards typically light to dark tan in colour with dark spots down the length of their back and a brown stripe from the ear to the tip of the nose. These little creatures are capable of firing up/down to change their colour, and so the same individual may appear light or dark at different times during the day. Mourners are social reptiles. They are cathemeral and can be heard and observed chirping at and chasing one another at virtually any time of day or night. Mourners are very agile climbers; this is due to specialized toe pads covered in setae (fine hairs that are found on the toe pads of many different species of arboreal gecko) that enable them to climb smooth and vertical surfaces, and even cross indoor ceilings and glass with ease. When threatened, they usually flee and hide under the nearest surface objects or in crevices. If captured, they will drop their tails in defence (the tail will move spasmodically to distract a potential predator), a process called caudal autotomy. The tail will then regrow over a period of weeks looking almost identical to the one that was lost. Mourning geckos are parthenogenic, which means that males are not necessary for reproduction. As such, while males do exist, they are very rare and often sterile. Females lay 1-2 adhesive eggs at a time and glue them to surfaces in protected locations. Clutches are usually laid every 4 to 6 weeks and the incubation period lasts 65-103 days. Hatchling mourners are miniscule measuring a mere 2cm in length but, even at this size are voracious predators. Fruit flies, gnats, midges and anything else small enough to be overpowered will be taken. The hatchlings and the adults are omnivores, and a selection of fruits, pollens and nectars will also be eaten. In captivity, prepared powdered diets make an excellent addition to the mourning gecko menu. We would never advise handling mourners as they are **so very fast**, it’s almost like they can teleport, couple that with their climbing ability and you can almost guarantee an escape. They still make adorable pets, and with their social nature, they can make excellent ornamental animals.

So, what is the best pet lizard? What lizard will be the best fit for your home and family? That’s not down to us, that one is down to you.

For more information on the natural history of these species, please get in touch –

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