

Fire Skink Care Guide

The fire skink (*Riopa fernandi*) is native to the western border of Africa. They are a great reptile to own and will tolerate handling very well. Fire Skinks have very distinctive colorations and love to burrow and dig. Most fire skinks are imported from the wild, but breeding them is slowly becoming more popular in the pet trade.



Appearance

Fire skinks display a mixture of black, white, silver, and bright red scales. Their backs are normally golden with red on the sides. Sometimes their colors will brighten or dull depending on their mood.

These geckos may be some of the easiest reptiles to tame and handle. They can even be felt without being jumpy like leopard geckos. They prefer to sit around during the day, and are much more active at night. Fat tailed geckos rarely bite, and if they do, you have upset or disturbed it. Be gentle and smooth with your motions when handling.

Handling/Aggression

Fire skinks can be very friendly reptiles that will enjoy handling as long as you treat them with respect. Reptiles learn from positive and negative experiences so do not grab or squeeze your skink. Short, positive handling sessions with a new skink will get them to quickly calm down.

Diet

Skinks are mainly insectivores, meaning they eat mostly insects. Feeder insects should be purchased, and crickets or king worms will be taken. Other insects like wax worms and mealworms can be fed once in a while. Adults can eat fruits like blueberries and strawberries along with dandelion greens. They can also be fed pinkie mice occasionally. These should only be used as treats or for breeding purposes because of their high fat content.

Prey must be live because they will wait for crickets to wander across their path, then strike. You also have to be sure to dust all prey with calcium supplement to keep his or her bones nice and strong. This should be done every couple feedings, and every feeding for babies.

Housing

Fire skinks will dig, burrow, and move about their cage, so the proper amount of room is required. Hatchlings can stay in a 10-20 gallon tank until they feel cramped. 30-40 gallons is the recommended tank size for adults. Driftwood pieces and plants can be provided to climb on and hide under.

Substrate

Skinks love to dig and borrow so loose substrates are needed. Many keepers have had success with a mixture of soil, sand, and wood chips. Substrate should be about 6 inches deep, and there really is no maximum depth. This substrate should stay damp, not wet and not dry. The substrate should stay about 70% humid while the rest of the tank can stay the humidity of the room.

Shelter

Considering the fact that skinks love to burrow, only a hide or two are required. Put a hide on the warm side and on the cool side. They will also hide under driftwood pieces and large, flat stones.

Temperature/Lighting

To heat the tank, you can use heat mats, heat tape, or an overhead bulb. Whichever you choose, it should provide a hot spot of about 92F. The rest of the tank does not need to be heated so they can thermoregulate. If you notice your skink staying on the warm side too long, then you may need to increase the temperature.

UVA or UVB lighting is a good idea to make sure they get the vitamin D3 they need. If you don't use them, then dust insects with vitamin D3 supplement. Never use hot rocks or heating devices that go inside the tank. They have been known to burn reptiles and amphibians.

Humidity/Water

A shallow water bowl big enough for them to lie in should be provided. As long as the substrate stays humid, misting is not required.

Cleaning

Cleaning can be pretty basic. Spot clean daily and remove feces as you see them. Remove any leftover or dead crickets and replace the water when it gets dirty. Substrate should be replaced every 2-4 months.

Breeding

Before breeding, make sure you have the right equipment and you have a well fed female and male. Be sure you know what you are doing before breeding. Fire skinks will breed from April to May. Once you are sure they have mated, they should be separated so the female does not become egg-bound.

A nesting box filled with perlite or sphagnum moss can be provided, but it may not be used because she may lay them anywhere in the tank. This can make eggs hard to find. A female will lay 6-8 eggs in a season, and once found, should be placed in an incubator. The incubators should be kept at a steady 85F for 40-50 days. Once they hatch, the real fun begins.

Hatchling Care

Hatchlings can be kept together as long as they don't feel cramped and there is no fighting or bullying. As they grow, they should be separated until they all have their own full sized tank. Feed dusted crickets to them every day and make sure they are all eating. They will start eating after the first shed, which will be about a week.

Conclusion

Fire skinks are great pets to own. They like their space, and will dig and burrow often. It is fun watching them attack unsuspecting crickets, and can become very tame with the right care. Remember, do your research before buying any pet so that it can live happily and healthily.