

# Crested Gecko Care Guide

An Extensive Guide to Being the Best Crestie Owner Ever



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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Scientific Name:           Correlophus ciliatus  
Place of Origin:           New Caledonia  
Gecko Hatch Date(s):  
Lifespan:                   15-20 years

Crested Geckos are a mid to high humidity, upper room temperature lizard that needs to eat both fruit (in captivity, it's meal replacement powder) and bugs like Crickets, Dubias, and Meal Worms. They are friendly, fun, and beautiful to look at. They change colors, (flame up) and get brighter and darker depending on their mood, alertness, humidity, temperature and other variables. One day your Crestie may be all one, muted, tone, and the next you have a bright Harlequin color mutation! They also have special sticky feet pads and a prehensile tail with a sticky pad at the end. These pads are *hydrophilic*, and when used in combination with what is essentially static cling, they become excellent climbers. Cresties are easy to care for... if you are observant and thoughtful when choosing your method of care. Everyone cares for their pets a little differently. Make sure you always watch your Crestie to see how he or she may respond to new or different environmental stimuli.

## HEALTH GUARANTEE

Because I believe that I have the knowledge, skill, and diligence required to breed happy, healthy Crested Geckos, I will guarantee the life of your gecko for 14 days after you take him/her home. This means that you are responsible for taking him/her to the vet if they should appear sick... If your gecko should die within two weeks, I will give you a second gecko if *and only if* you can prove to me that the quality of the enclosure was up to par and you made every possible effort to keep your little one healthy.

## PREPARING FOR YOUR GECKO

Before you take home your Gecko, make sure you know what you're in for. Though Crested Geckos are known as a hardier, easier to care for animal than a lot of other reptiles, make sure you're prepared for the baby before it gets home. **Babies are a lot more sensitive to change and aren't nearly as hardy as adults!** Have your entire enclosure set up and ready to go. Make sure you've checked (and double checked) the ambient room temperature and made necessary lighting/heating adjustments to match those listed as acceptable on this care sheet. Make sure the enclosure won't need any new adjustments right after you put your gecko in it. **You**

won't want to be poking around and rearranging things unless absolutely necessary for the first month or so, since you need to let your little guy gradually acclimate to his/her new home.

## BRINGING HOME YOUR GECKO

On the day you take home your new gecko, he/she will be very stressed out. Since these little guys are locally bred, they've never moved outside of the room they hatched in. Keep this in mind when transporting—keep them warm, preferably in the dark, and make the trip home as short as possible. Don't stop anywhere along the way! When you get home, set the take-home container you brought them in into the enclosure (if size facilitates this). Open the container and let your Crestie explore at will. This way your baby will be able to exit the container of its own accord, and won't stress as much. If your Crestie takes more than 24 hours to exit the container, take him/her out *slowly and gently* and place him/her in the tank. Don't take out your crested gecko to visit until it's been at least a week, at minimum. Wait to see if your Crestie takes more adventurous steps out into his/her enclosure before testing how he/she responds to you.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Your Crestie will take some time to adjust. In the first months of your new life together, watch for these things and be aware that they're normal! However, be vigilant: these things can be warning signs and may be impactful on your Crestie's health.

- **Fasting**
  - **Often times, Geckos feeling stressed out will avoid food for a little while after being rehomed.**
  - Track your Crestie's feeding habits and make sure that they eventually start eating after rehoming.
  - This can take up to about a month.
  - Since yours is so young, though, after about one week of avoiding food, I'd start examining other possibilities for why your Crestie may not be eating.
- **Hiding**
  - Baby Cresties are scared, especially in a new home without their brothers and sisters.
  - Wait a week **at minimum** before handling.
  - **Provide a hide for your gecko that is opaque.**
  - Take handling gradually! They need to build up trust with you.
- **Threatening Bites or Actually Biting**
  - Crested geckos will only bite if they are TOO SCARED!

- **Put back your baby if it starts to bite or act like it will.**
- Crestie bites don't hurt, so don't be afraid!
- As your Crestie gets older, it may use biting as a tactic to get put back in it's tank. **If you want a social, adult Crestie, be prepared to let it bite you.** This will teach it that it won't get to go home just because it's feeling feisty.
- **Jumping**
  - Your Crestie will always jump, it's part of it's nature.
  - **Attempting to catch your Crestie in mid air will often times lead to accidentally swatting it out of the air.**
  - A Crestie can take a fall—if it jumps, it's usually a good idea to let it fall before picking it up. It's never worth risking swatting him/her out of the air!
  - The more nervous your Crestie is, the more it will jump. If it jumps over and over again, try putting it back and trying again in a day or two.
- **Shedding**
  - Geckos shed more frequently when they're young since they grow more
  - Colors will become muted and they will have a harder time sticking to things with their feet and tail before a shed
  - **Don't feed crickets before a shed!** This can be a hazard of Cricket aggression AND impaction, ESPECIALLY for a baby!
  - Cresties are known to eat their shed! If it looks like your Crestie has more color but you can't find his/her shed, they probably ate it.
  - **SHED CAN GET STUCK AND CAUSE SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES!!! Be wary of this especially with your baby!**
    - Low temperature or humidity can cause shedding problems- Raise humidity a bit to aid shedding.
    - **Your Crestie can lose a finger, hand, or even tail to this issue!**
    - See the "health issues" section for more information and how to help your Crestie get off stuck shed.

## SOCIALIZING

Once your baby has fully acclimated to his or her tank setup, please be patient when beginning to handle him/her. Handle your Crestie with care and consideration for his/her stress level. Start out handling 3-5 minutes a day and gradually increasing, eventually your Crestie will feel comfortable enough to literally lick baby food off your hand, or snatch a cricket from your forceps!

Remember, as a high humidity animal in the desert, your Crestie will immediately feel the humidity change as you handle him/her. This means that you won't be able

to take him or her out with you, because you don't want your Crestie getting dehydrated or stressed. Among various other life-threatening dangers, this one is almost the least of the problems you'd encounter trying to bring your Crestie with you to a coffee shop!

**Remember that your Crestie is nocturnal, and might be more fun to hang out with at night or in a low-light setting.** The dark is easier for them to see in, and their pupils grow to almost the size of their whole eye in the dark! Don't worry, this is normal. Your Crestie is *not* using drugs! (Whew)

## FOOD

### Repashy (Main Diet)

Repashy was made by Allen Repashy and is widely-accepting in the local and online herpetological community as the cornerstone diet for a Crested Gecko. I would not recommend any other food as your Crestie's main food source. Why? This diet is *perfectly fitted* to meet the dietary needs of your Crestie! It's the healthiest, yummiest, and easiest to feed MRP (meal replacement powder) out there. It's always available in pet stores and it smells like fruit. It's going to be the best way to keep your little one healthy.

**Frequency:** As hatchlings to 2-4 month olds, I feed this MRP to my Cresties daily. They will not eat it all. However, due to the possibility that small changes can stress out a baby Crestie, I find it's best to keep a steady supply for the babies. If they get full, they simply won't eat. **After that, feed Repashy 3-4 times a week. Stagger these days with the 1-2x a week you feed dusted crickets.**

**Remember:** Your Crestie can become dehydrated easily if you mix the food too thick! Stick to the 2:1 water to powder ratio, and you should get a ketchup-y like consistency.

**will spoil.**

### Repashy, continued

**To Mix:** Dilute the Repashy powder with twice as much water. Don't make the food too hot, or they won't eat it. Consider that 80° is too hot for a Crestie. If your internal temperature is about 98.8°, if it feels warm to your finger, it's probably too warm for them. I put ½ the water warm in first, mix the clumps out, and add the other ½ of the water in cold. This way you can still mix all the clumps out before cooling down the mixture. **Repashy cannot keep for more than one day. Put the food in their tank at night, and the next afternoon or night take it out. It**

## **Crickets (Supplemented with Calcium)**

Dust crickets with a supplemental calcium (and even gut load them with cricket gut loader) before feeding them to your Crestie. Feed small size crickets to start out, and about 3-6 depending on the appetite of your Crestie. If they want more, feed a few more. However, **overfeeding crickets & bugs can become a health issue for your Crestie if it happens too frequently.** I only feed my geckos crickets once a week. I would only feed them two times per week at maximum. **Take out left over crickets, alive and dead. Living crickets can gang up on and try to eat your Crestie, causing injury. Dead crickets rot and smell awful!**

## **Dubias (Also Supplemented with Calcium)**

Dubias are a small roach that doesn't really look like a roach. **These are much healthier than crickets and are a suitable replacement for crickets in the diet of your Crestie!** They are a bit more expensive, and sometimes hard to find. They can't climb glass, so they're easier to contain, but they do burrow. Sometimes Cresties won't immediately start eating Dubias if they have already been fed a cricket. If you think of Crickets as a snickers bar, Dubias are a filet mignon! If you can, I highly recommend feeding Dubias in place of Crickets. **You will still want to dust Dubias with Calcium powder, just like you would with Crickets.** Plenty of pet stores carry Dubias as well as Crickets.

## **Treats**

Treats can include waxworms and other bugs, or fruit or organic, all-natural, additive free baby foods. (Make sure you check that the ingredients are only fruit and water!)

Feeding waxworms is fatty, and should only be done every few days or weeks. **Waxworms can potentially bite your Crestie and even eat their way out through the stomach of your baby!**

Make sure you always crush or cut off the heads of these guys so they don't cause any harm to your Crestie.

Because even all-natural, organic baby food does not contain the proper calcium to vitamin D3 proportion, **only feed baby food as a treat.** Make sure you are buying Repashy as the main food source.

**Don't feed your Crested Gecko any mealworms or superworms! They are too rich in Chitin for your little guy. Waxworms are okay occasionally.**

Don't ever feed your Crestie a bug off the floor! Crested Geckos can get parasites and other health issues from bugs you pick up off the ground.

## **HOUSING**

Housing is *absolutely* essential to the well being of your baby. This is going to be the most expensive part of your new pet going forward, but a good tank means a happy and healthy Crestie! Don't skimp on these things, they are just as important to the wellbeing of the Crestie as are food and water!

Crested Geckos are an arboreal lizard. This means they climb and hide up in the trees. They need a TALL, not LONG tank! Look at Zoo Med and Exo Terra's line of tall tanks, these suit Crested Geckos of all sizes.

At 2 months, a Crestie will do fine in a medium to large critter keeper. As it grows, you will want to continually size up the tank. When they're fully grown, the bigger the better!! The minimum tank size for a full grown Crestie is about 10 gallons. Check out Exo Terra's 12x12x19 (Mini Tall) tank which is about 10 gallons. If you have more than one Crestie you will need a bigger tank.

### **Hiding & Sleeping**

Crested Geckos are nocturnal. Since they like to sleep all day, give them a nice hide to sleep in. They won't always choose to sleep in their designated place. This doesn't mean they don't appreciate it! For babies, you can use small tarantula hides, or ones meant for other types of lizards. Later, you can use those fancy magnetic hides that stick to the side of the tank—this way they can sleep up high if they want!

Hides are essential to the emotional wellbeing of your little one. If they don't have a place to run away and feel safe, they may get over stressed and subsequently unhealthy.

### **Climbing**

Use vines and fake plants to allow your Crestie to climb and jump away! This is essential because they are arboreal and in nature will spend all day in the trees. If you're ambitious, you can live-plant a vivarium for your gecko! This takes a LOT more time, money and effort, but is worth it if you're wanting a highly aesthetically pleasing tank. Look up internet tutorials on how to live plant a Crested Gecko tank. **Make sure the plants you use are safe for the geckos** and require similar humidity & temperature levels, so you don't kill one trying to nurture the other.

### **Water & Humidity**

Cresties absolutely need to be sprayed down every single night. Make sure you get the sides of the tank; Cresties love to lick the water off the glass and are less likely to drink out of a dish. Always use a dish, too. More than once I've caught my adults bathing and drinking from the dish. In our climate, it's never too much! Change the dish water **daily**.



**Cresties need a humidity fluctuation throughout the day.** Allow them to get more dry over the course of the day, then wet them down really well at night. Monitor the humidity to make sure it doesn't get below about 30% at the driest point. At night it can be sprayed to about 80%. You can use a spray bottle or mister to spray them down. I wouldn't recommend a Repti-fogger; those are only fog and don't have enough condensation that the Cresties will lick water off the sides of the tank. **Be thinking about how you plan to keep your Crestie humid enough, especially when it's shedding time! Sometimes it gets dry enough that they need to be sprayed down multiple times a day.**

### **Temperature**

In the daytime, temperature should be between 75-80° and can drop to low 70s at night. In winter, temperatures at night can drop to high 60s. A ceramic heat emitter or low-wattage, blue color incandescent bulb can provide heat if needed. Usually a room temperature room will suffice and you won't need any additional heating or lighting. **If you do get a heater of any type, make sure your Crestie has a thermal gradient so he/she can choose their temperature.** Usually a Crestie will be careful of heat but to be safe **place the heat source far enough away from the tank that the Crestie cannot burn itself on the heat source or screen.**

### ***A Clean Crestie is a Happy Crestie!***

Crestie poop is stinky and quickly can degrade your little guy's air quality! Do regular poop pick ups, change substrate regularly and clean off all tank ornaments that get pooped on!

## Substrate

- **Paper Towels at Early Ages**

- A young Crestie hunting for crickets is inevitably going to be a bit (or very) clumsy!
- A mouthful of substrate will cause impaction if the substrate clogs up the gut
  - Baby Cresties are especially at risk for this since they are so small, their intestines are at a much higher risk for clogging
  - Baby Cresties can get **mouth rot** if they get a mouthful of substrate as well. **See the health issues section for more information on mouth rot.**
- Paper towels need to be changed at least weekly.
- Let your Crestie get good at hunting for crickets before they are changed to a grainy substrate that can cause impaction.
- See the “health issues” section for information about impaction.

- **Dehydrated Cocoa Husk Later**

- Dehydrated cocoa husk is cheap and good for maintaining humidity in your Cresties tank.
- Change every few weeks, or earlier if the tank gets noticeably stinky
- Watch carefully for impaction

- **Sphagnum Moss**

- Good for retaining humidity
- Can be put in a hide for a “humidity box”
- Don’t scatter moss all over the tank bottom—crickets can hide and breed in there! Also makes it harder to detect mites and other small bug problems.

### **EXOTIC VETERINARIANS IN ALBUQUERQUE**

**Academy Pet Hospital**  
6000 Academy Rd NE,  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
(505) 822-0255

**Northview Animal Hospital**  
7601 Anaheim Ave NE,  
Albuquerque, NM 87122  
(505) 828-1136

## **HEALTH ISSUES**

This is not a complete list of health issues your gecko can have. This is a list of the most common ones, and ones that can be *easily* avoided by responsible pet ownership. Do not hesitate to do your own research or talk to your vet... It’s better late than never.

### **Shed Issues**

Baby Geckos shed frequently. If your gecko isn’t humid or warm enough, it can end up having pieces of shed stuck all over it. Make sure to regularly examine your Crestie for

stuck shed. If your gecko has some stuck shed, put it in a shallow bath of lukewarm water with some paper towels over the top. **Make sure the Crestie can still breathe, because, you know, breathing can be kind of important and stuff.** Pet stores also carry Shed Ease, which you can put in the bath to help them shed. After the shed is totally saturated, **gently** try and pull it off (careful, too hard and you will rip the skin). You may have to wait until the shed dries to peel it off so it isn't too gummy or attached to the skin. Stuck shed is serious and can lead to decreased circulation, and subsequently loss of extremities. Be vigilant!

## Mites

Mites are tiny, parasitic bugs. They live on every animal, including humans. Sometimes, certain conditions can cause mite populations to grow out of control and result in an infestation. Mites can be merely a nuisance, eating gecko poop and crickets, and getting stuck and drowning in water or food. However, an infestation of mites can be a hazard to the health of your Crestie if the type of mite is one that will harm the Crestie itself.

Checking for mites can be hard since they're so tiny. Look in the food, water, and stools for signs of mites, and observe if cricket carcasses left over are munched on when you collect them. Mites will hide under the substrate and under food bowls. Pick them up quickly and with a light illuminate possible hiding spots. If you see what looks like the substrate move when you pick up the food bowl or dig up substrate, you might have mites.

You can use prevent-a-mite to prevent or kill infestations. **Be very careful to follow the instructions on the can** as the solution may be a hazard to your Crestie should you expose them to it before you let the tank dry out. **ADDITIONALLY**, if you have any tarantulas at all, remember that these are *technically a mite as well, so you should never use prevent-a-mite on or near your tarantulas!* This will kill them.

Diatomaceous Earth is a natural insecticide that is okay for Cresties to be near. You can mix this into their substrate and even give them a Diatomaceous Earth dust-bath to get mites off their skin. *If you do this, make sure you wet down their nose, mouth and eyes first:* If they breathe in the substrate it can hurt their lungs! Wetting them down on their face will cause any Diatomaceous Earth to stick to the water before they inhale it. You can pick up diatomaceous earth in the dog and cat section of most pet stores, it is also used as an all-natural de-wormer for other pets. You can also put Diatomaceous Earth in the Cresties food (in small amounts) to make sure they don't have any intestinal parasites.

Usually one treatment does not work. Remember to keep looking into your Crestie's tank for mites after you treat. It can take 4-6 weeks to fully eradicate the issue.

## Impaction

- Symptoms Include
  - Constipation
  - Bloating
  - Lethargy
  - Lack of Appetite

Your Crestie may accidentally gulp down some substrate while trying to eat a cricket. This is why I **always supervise cricket feedings, especially with babies**. If you catch your Crestie get a mouthful of substrate, immediately take as much of the substrate as you can out of the mouth and rinse with water. Try to make sure the Crestie drinks some water to wash down any substrate that might've gotten down their throat. **If you think your Crestie has impaction take him/her to your vet immediately.** Bits of substrate can also get in your Crestie's face and eyes, so keep a lookout for that.

## Mouth Rot (Infectious Stomatitis)

- Symptoms Include
  - Increased amounts of mucus in the mouth
  - Excess Salivation
  - Red dots on or in the mouth
  - Deformation of face shape
- If untreated, Infectious Stomatitis will cause these symptoms on or near the mouth
  - Swelling
  - Cracking
  - Bleeding
  - Necrosis
  - Osteomyelitis (infection of the bone), Pneumonia, Chronic Weakness
    - Excruciatingly painful
    - Requires *aggressive* treatment (and expensive)
  - Death
- If your Crestie gets a mouthful of substrate, watch carefully for signs of Infectious Stomatitis! The sooner you catch it, the better. **If you suspect mouth rot, take your Crestie to the vet immediately. This will require antibiotics to treat.**

## **Floppy Tail Syndrome (FTS)**

As your Crestie gets older, you may notice it's tail start to droop. It has been theorized in the past that it's a lack of calcium in the diet that can cause this. However, now it is believed that it's from a bone deformation caused by the Crestie sleeping upside down, and the weakening of the tail muscle. It doesn't seem to be too serious, but if you notice your Crestie sleeping upside down, I'd recommend gently repositioning them.

## **Metabolic Bone Disease (NHS)**

- Symptoms:
  - Swollen & Crooked Limbs
  - Loss of appetite
  - Muscle tremors
  - Lethargy

Commonly known as Metabolic Bone Disease, Nutritional Secondary Hyperparathyroidism (NHS) is usually a deficiency in calcium. Cresties cannot synthesize calcium without the appropriate amount of vitamin D3, either, so if you're not feeding Repashy (which supplies appropriate amounts of calcium and D3) 3-4 times a week this is a potential risk. Always calcium dusting your crickets and making sure you get lots of Repashy in your Crestie baby's belly is the only way to avoid this situation. If you suspect NHS, try upping the calcium intake with some RescueCal+ by Repashy. **If you overly supplement calcium, your Crestie's organs can calcify. Be careful!**

## **RESOURCES & REFERENCES**

**MoonValleyReptiles.com:** Reputable breeders with extensive information and breeding experience. Catalogues common & popular Crested Gecko illnesses, morphs, questions and more!

**JBsCresties.com** Lots and lots of important, detailed information.

**SEAVS.com** Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services has a website that contains important information about the medical side of owning any exotic pets.

**TheGeckoGeek.com** Has a very helpful guide on color morphs!

**ME!** As the one who brought your little guy into the world, I will be there for the lifespan of your pet. I owe it to you, to the Crestie, and to myself to make sure that I will be available to help you to keep the happiest, healthiest Crestie you can! I'm here to help you succeed as a pet owner.

## HOUSING CHECKLIST

Things you should have before you take your Crestie home

- Tank: large critter keeper up to 5 gallons (critter keeper only works until 1 year of age)
- Paper Towels: Substitute for substrate at early age, cocoa husk later.
- Water dish: not deep enough to drown in
- Food dish: young Cresties are fine with extra small deli-cups or bottle lids
- Repashy Meal Replacement Powder
- Mister of some sort, use filtered water if you'd like to avoid calcification on tank.
- Climbing: Fake vines and/or plants
- Hide: Wood not recommended (mold and splinters are a risk)
- Shed-ease and tweezers: For removing stuck shed

## DAILY MAINTAINENCE CHECKLIST

- Feed Repashy every other day
- Mist tank down to 70-90% humidity
- Check Gecko for stuck shed

## WEEKLY MAINTANENCE CHECKLIST

- Feed calcium dusted Crickets or Dubias
- Clean out cricket carcasses
- Clean tank (or bi-weekly, depending on tank size & condition)

## PET STORES

**Be wary of where you shop:** misinformation is plentiful and spreads like the plague! I personally endorse the following shops, and encourage you to shop locally!! These stores also carry Crested Geckos bred by yours truly.

**The Dancing Turtle** Owned by Chris Lim, this eclectic and exciting mix of reptile love and breakdance studio is truly a pleasure to visit. Chris is an exceptionally knowledgeable resource for any and all reptile or arachnid owners. He carries live food and all supplies recommended for Crestie ownership. Visit him on Facebook or in person at 4706 Lomas Blvd. NE.

**Clark's Pet Supply & Clark's Pet Emporium** Staff at Clark's is known for being knowledgeable. Also carrying all necessary Crestie supplies (and then some), I'd recommend Clark's as well. Visit the *Emporium* location 4914 Lomas Blvd NE or the heights *Supply* at 11200 Menaul Blvd. NE.

## SUMMARY

Crestie ownership is incredible and exciting.

Don't go into it without full financial and mental commitment. Your Crestie is counting on you to be the awesome parent it knows you can be! Please don't hesitate to contact me for duplicate copies of this guide, or with any and all questions and concerns.

Remember, never stop researching!



Thanks for reading, and best of luck!

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