

Fire Skink (*Mochlus fernandi*)

Difficulty: Intermediate



Fire skinks are small, terrestrial lizards native to western Africa, where they can be found primarily in woodlands and forests. These skinks are diurnal, which means that they are primarily active during the day. Their diet is insectivorous, which means that they primarily hunt insects for food.

Fire skinks can grow over 12" long, with males typically being larger than females. Most of the fire skinks in the pet trade are wild-caught, but captive-bred individuals are available and tend to be more active and overall healthier pets. With good care, fire skinks are capable of living 15-20 years.

What You Need for a Bioactive Fire Skink Terrarium

- Front-opening 36"L x 18"W x 18"H terrarium
- [60w Exo Terra Daytime Heat Lamp](#), x2
- [5.5" Arcadia Ceramic Reflector Clamp Lamp](#), x2
- Rheostat
- [22" Arcadia Forest 6% UVB bulb](#)
- [24" Bio Dude Solar Grow T5 HO Single Bulb Light Strip](#)
- [16" Bio Dude Glow & Grow LED](#), x2
- [Zilla 24/7 Digital Timer Power Center](#)
- [Exo Terra 2qt Mister](#)
- [Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer](#), x2
- [Bio Dude 40 Breeder Terra Firma Bioactive Substrate Kit](#)

- [Bio Dude Ball Python Clean-Up Crew Pack](#)
- [Ball Python Starter Plant Pack](#)
- [Cork tubes + flats](#)
- [Caves/Hides](#) (at least 1)
- [Water dish](#)
- Repashy Calcium Plus LoD multivitamin supplement

Terrarium Size

The minimum enclosure size recommended for housing a single fire skink is **36" L x 18" W x 18" H**, or a 40-gallon terrarium. However, when it comes to choosing a terrarium for pet reptiles, keep in mind that larger is always better! This gives them enough room to hunt, exercise, and thermoregulate to satisfaction.

As a general rule, fire skinks should not be housed together in the same enclosure.

Lighting

Technically speaking, pet fire skinks can survive without UVB lighting — instead relying on supplements for their vitamin D3 requirement. However, this is not the best practice, as UVB provides benefits beyond just vitamin D3 synthesis, such as: preventing illness, improving nervous and digestive function, and improving mental health.

In other words, we recommend installing appropriate UVB lighting as part of your skink's setup! The **22" T5 HO Arcadia Forest 6% UVB** is likely to work the best for a fire skink in a 36"-48" long enclosure with a mesh top. Because UVB lamp efficacy is affected by basking distance, a fire skink's basking area should be 7-9" directly below the lamp.

Your UVB bulb must be replaced every 12 months to maintain its output. Resist the temptation to use other, cheaper brands — when it comes to UVB, *brand matters!*

Because this is a bioactive setup, you will also need plant light to encourage healthy plant growth. We recommend two linked **16" Bio Dude Glow & Grow LED lamps** to span the length of the terrarium and provide sufficient illumination for all of your plants.

Both lighting and heating should be on for 12 hours/day.

Heating

The temperatures within a fire skink's terrarium should be as follows:

- **Basking area temperature:** 92-96°F
- **Cool zone temperature:** 75-85°F
- **Nighttime temperature:** 70-75°F

To create a basking area for your fire skink, you will need 2 low-wattage white heat bulbs like the **60w Exo Terra Daytime Heat Lamp** and a heat lamp fixture like the **Arcadia Ceramic Reflector Clamp Lamp 5.5"**. Place the lamps in a cluster on the extreme left or right of the setup. If the basking area gets too

warm, you can plug the lamp into a lamp dimmer like the **Zoo Med ReptiTemp Rheostat** and reduce the heat output that way. If the basking area is too cool, you will need higher-wattage bulbs.

Use a digital probe thermometer like the **Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer** to track your temperature gradient, with one temperature probe on the basking spot and one on the cool side.

Humidity

Fire skinks require a moderately high-humidity environment. To be specific, they need an **average of 60-70% humidity**, although occasional fluctuations higher and/or lower are fine. Keep track of your humidity levels with a digital hygrometer like the **Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer**, with the probe secured to a branch in the middle of the enclosure, preferably in a shaded area.

To raise the humidity in your skink's enclosure and provide a source of drinking water, use an **Exo Terra 2qt Mister** to wet things down every evening (and morning if needed). If you need help maintaining humidity, you can intermittently run a reptile fogger with distilled water at night.

Substrate

To create a bioactive fire skink enclosure that will be successful in the long term, you can't just use any old substrate, add a few bugs and plants, and call it a day. A thick layer of bioactive-compatible substrate is essential!

First, layer ~2" of clay balls or **Bio Dude HydroGrow** drainage material and place a layer of **tight mesh** on top to help prevent soil from getting into the drainage layer.

Next, you will need a soil-like mix that mimics the conditions of a forest floor and will nourish your plants. If you want to make your own, you will need a mixture of 50% organic topsoil, 25% peat moss or coconut fiber, and 25% play sand, at least 45 quarts total volume. Mix that with leaf litter, sphagnum moss, and 4 doses of **12qt Bio Shot** to inoculate your soil with beneficial microfauna.

Alternatively, you can let The Bio Dude do the work for you with **The Bio Dude's 40 Breeder Terra Firma bioactive substrate kit**.

To make the substrate functional, make sure to add temperate to tropical CUC organisms like powder blue/orange isopods, dwarf isopods, and arid springtails. You can also add other species like dubia roaches, super worms, earthworms, and millipedes!

Decorating the Enclosure

Enclosure décor is more than just making your setup look good. It's also an important part of providing *environmental enrichment*, which enhances your pet's quality of life by providing opportunities to express natural behaviors. Given that fire skinks are a terrestrial species, you will need enrichment items like small cork hollows, caves, and foliage to give them ample opportunities to explore and hide. Make sure to clutter it up! Although it seems counterintuitive, the more opportunities your pet has to hide, the more comfortable it will be out in the open.

Live plants in particular are critical to helping your mini-ecosystem function properly. Appropriate plants for a bioactive fire skink terrarium include Aglaonema, croton, ficus, peperomia, philodendron, and

pothos. Note that fire skinks can be quite destructive to their plants, so make sure to choose durable varieties for your vivarium!

Feeding Your Fire Skink

Fire skinks are insectivores, which means that they need to eat a varied diet of insects in order to get proper nutrition. Feed juveniles daily to every other day, and adults every 3-4 days. Offer enough insects for the skink to eat consecutively in a 5-minute period. Feeders should be no larger than the skink's head.

The key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for any reptile is VARIETY! Here's a quick list of foods that are safe to feed to your fire skink:

Best insects: crickets, dubia roaches, discoid roaches, snails, black soldier fly larvae, hornworms, silkworms, earthworms, mealworms, super worms

Supplements

Although feeder insects should be gut loaded with a specialized gut load formula for 24-48 hours before feeding, they will also need to be "dusted" with an appropriate supplement powder just before. There are many options, but the **Arcadia Earthpro supplement system** is excellent. If that's too complicated for your taste, Repashy CalciumPlus LoD is a reliable all-in-one. For best results, use as directed by the label.

Drinking Water

Fire skinks should have access to a small bowl of water at all times. The water should be kept clean at all times, with the dish scrubbed out with veterinary-grade disinfectant weekly to discourage bacterial growth.

Care information courtesy of [ReptiFiles](#).