

## Tips for handling your reptiles

### Handling your new pet reptiles



When getting a new reptile we know it can be quite tempting to want to handle it a lot when you first get it home. However, this can be the start of a defensive relationship with your reptile. New reptiles will need an acclimation period after any events, including being introduced into a new environment that he/she is unfamiliar with. It is good practice to wait till your new pet is eating regularly on a stable diet so they continue eating and not stop eating as a stress response. With this husbandry being on point is the most important thing to get and keep a healthy reptile; even if it means being a look at pet versus a handling pet.

Typically, new owners expect reptiles to not move much when being handled, based on the way they act before being taken to a new home. This is rarely the case. When holding it is important to be in an escape free area and make sure that the animal is completely supported when handling. This will prevent the critter from flailing around, potentially injuring themselves and the owner. At reptile shows or pet stores they may behave differently, being more docile, calm or “chill”; usually a stress response to the activity going

on around them, being too cold, being moved for the reptile shows and being handled a lot before being sold. They need to de-stress completely before any interaction as you never *really* know how your new animal will behave until it has calmed down completely and has proper husbandry.

The best way to look at it is this. Being that these are wild animals, they need to establish a sense of security of their surroundings. They need to make sure there are no predators, no angry males or other animal territories in which they need to stay away from or potentially even take from another animal. This acclimation period is very important because it gives your pet the ability to understand what is around them.

<https://www.thebiodude.com/blogs/helpful-husbandry-faqs/what-do-i-need-to-know-before-getting-my-first-reptile>

### **Threat displays and Biting**

Getting bit by your reptile is always going to be a possibility as it is a wild animal. Any biting, of course, can seem intimidating to any keeper, new or experienced. Learning your animal's individual personality is the best way to gauge how they are feeling when you intend to handle them. This comes with time and observing your animal. Since reptiles see us as a temperature, we are a big, red, scary blob that could be a predator that could want to hurt them. When in actuality we are just there to hold them, sometimes resulting in the reptile threat displaying to try and scare you.

All reptiles have different ways of showing stress and or a threat display, some will hiss loudly, rattlesnakes have rattles, cottonmouths have the bright mouths meant to be a warning as their namesake implies. Chameleons can turn multiple bright or dark shades, iguanas tail whip, tokay geckos will bark loudly and huff while throwing their small body in your direction. In very stressful situations, some geckos will detach and throw their tail at you as a distraction. Snakes from venomous and non venomous will shake their tail in ground debris to make a noise similar to that of rattlesnakes, but most of the smaller species of reptiles just open their mouth in your direction and hope for you to go away. Some reptiles even have an anticoagulant in saliva that can make you bleed a bit more than you would normally think, from the teeny tiny pin holes their teeth.

It's important to take extra measures to sanitize and clean any bites or scratches to prevent infection. Having a snake hook handy is a good tool to give yourself some security in dealing with the reptiles that are less enthusiastic about being handled, gloves and wearing long sleeved shirts can help minimize accidental scratch damage as well.

### **Safely getting the reptile out of the enclosure**

Very gently, pick up your reptile with intent and confidence; complete, secure, stability keeps them feeling safe and from flailing around which can lead to the reptile being defensive and biting or falling and injuring themselves. Do not grab the animal from above

aggressively; by the head, or any limbs; this can incite a fear response and can cause some to drop their tails.

Flat hands, walk the smaller ones with legs from one hand to the other, letting the snakes slither their way through your fingers or hands. Larger species that are more docile sometimes need to be handled like giant babies, taking care to handle them with the same stability as any smaller reptile. 15 minutes of frequent handling can help get most of them used to it. The more socialblade species take to it quickly, such as [Bearded dragons](#), [Leopard geckos](#), [Corn snakes](#) and [Crested geckos](#), making it easier for you. Some just never tolerate it.

We do not recommend holding any amphibians without the use of gloves that are NOT POWDERED.

### **Sanitization**

All reptiles have a different level of intelligence. One notable feature of most species is that they will quickly learn from operant conditioning. If you only handle them when you feed them, they will associate you with feeding every time you open the enclosure and the chances of getting taste tested as a snack is higher. Making sure to wash your hands before and after.

It is important to mention that in a lot of ZOOs, aquariums and animal facilities there are special protocols in place for the more difficult reptiles like venomous species, larger species of snakes and larger monitor lizards for the handlers safety that should be followed, handling of these animals without proper knowledge can lead to serious injuries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5a25DfNpHEA>

### **Creating the human animal bond**

<https://www.thebiodude.com/blogs/bio-activity-with-your-pets-how-does-it-work-with-mine/how-to-create-feeding-stations-and-how-to-train-your-reptiles-and-amphibians-to-use-them>

For those that do not want to be handled, using feeding stations is a great way to “train” them into associating with you. For example, when you open up the enclosure have food

on tongs ready. If you decide to create this association, be ready for them to want to eat every time you open the cage!

Another great example is supervised outdoor time. For many reptiles, outside time with natural sunlight and heat is a huge treat, especially for tortoises, turtles and lizards. Providing an outdoor safe space from predators and escaping is a great resource to not only nurture the bond but to provide enrichment for your reptile.

As humans it's only natural that we want to express affection to our pets and want to hold them but sometimes they do not want to be held and that's okay as reptiles do not need handling to thrive. They are a fascinating pet to have regardless and must be respected as stress can lead to an unhealthy animal.

<https://www.thebiodude.com/blogs/helpful-husbandry-faqs/what-you-need-to-know-about-reptile-enrichment>

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