

Why is my reptile shedding? What do I need to look for with shedding animals?

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Introduction:

Skin is a complex organ and is often regarded as being most complex in reptiles and amphibians. This is due to their unique process of ecdysis, or shedding. This article will help break down the shedding process and hopefully help with any questions you may have about the process.



My reptile is shedding, why?

All reptiles and amphibians shed, as it's part of their regular life/growth cycle. It is believed they do this because of what scales are made of. Their skin is not as flexible as mammals and needs to be removed in this specific process. Some reptiles and amphibians may eat it, while most leave it behind. Normal shedding with all the pieces coming off the body indicates ideal husbandry has been met, along with a happy reptile! Sometimes you may not even notice this process is happening until there is shed present in the enclosure. Reptilian evolution has tailored each of their husbandry needs to shed perfectly with the biome they are native to, so it's important we hit these marks at home so they can thrive.

What is the shed made of?

Reptiles have around four levels of epidermis, or skin. The outermost layer is thinner, temporary and made of the same fibrous element human hair and nails are made of, keratin. It is thin but strong and helps protect the reptile from predators. Because this thin layer comes loose it

clouds the reptile's eyes and makes it hard for them to see. With the correct humidity the animal will shed on its own, perfectly removing the pieces.

How to tell they are shedding?

Reptiles will typically hide at first while the skin is coming loose, or stuff their bodies into their water bowls, soaking up the extra humidity needed to make the skin soft for easier removal. Most reptiles can turn quite dull in color during this time, losing all natural shine, turning matte. You may notice the skin getting a white cover tone to it. The eyes will become clouded over, almost a light blue color as it becomes loose, making it hard for them to see. Sometimes the eyes go back to normal before shedding.

What happens during and after

If you have an animal that is known to soak in their water bowl, they might be doing this more often during this time. Offer them something larger that they can fit in and soak on their own, if not already available. It will start peeling off, starting at the nose, face, and even the eyes as the reptile moves around, using the things inside the enclosure to rub against to help scratch and remove the shedding. They will have a lovely new bright tone to their scales color and some will have a temporary iridescence to them, like snakes.

While some reptiles may not be interested in eating during this process, they are usually readily hungry after shedding. Active, moving around and exploring for food. You may offer food as per your reptile's normal feeding schedule as they may eat during the shedding process, As you learn the reptile's behaviors and personality you will know what the animal prefers during this time and what to do. Typically this is adding extra sprays for humidity spikes and no handling as this may stress them out.

How often does this happen?

A growing reptile will shed more often than an adult as they are gaining weight, one to two times a month. An adult will shed less often, every few months, or once to two times a year as it varies per species as they are not growing and don't need to get rid of the tight outer layer.

With proper humidity, All of the shedding should come off at once, none of it should stay on the reptile. If the excess shed cannot come off easily this can create skin infections and may need veterinary intervention to fix. The stuck shedding may also become tight around limbs and digits cutting off circulation, This can especially happen if the animal is overweight. It should also be noted that assisting them by peeling it off should not be done, let them remove this on their own.

Most keepers go the extra step with making sure there are no shedding issues by offering a humid hide along with regular daily spraying or misting. This will allow the reptile to go get the extra humidity needed if they feel the need to do so on their own.

What happens to the shed?

Most frogs and gecko species will peel their shedding off with their mouths and eat it. This is thought to be for two purposes, the skin is a food item full of minerals and it is thought to be a safety measure to prevent predators from tracking them. Lizards and tortoises will shed in pieces and leave it behind, while snakes and spiders will also leave them behind and will shed in one solid piece, although spider moltings look almost exactly like a *live* spider.

All sheds that are left behind turn into organic matter used in soil processing. Clean up crews such as Isopods will take every available source of calcium for their diet, using the calcium in the shedding to make their outer shell. You can bury any left over shed in the substrate for the clean up crew to take care of.

The dudes soils and shedding

The Dude has designed unique [soil mixes](#) to perfectly hold humidity at all times, keeping the plants healthy but also for your reptile's shedding needs. Whether it is a rainforest-dwelling, tropical or desert species, these mixes will help you accomplish the husbandry needed for your animals overall health. While the soil is mainly geared around self maintaining-bioactivity, they work well for the reptiles' enclosures to match their biomes weather as best we can so they have the easiest shedding possible.

The Dude Abides

-E. Grosenheider