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Introduction to Anole Care

Anoles are abundant in North and South America and the Caribbean. There are almost 400 species of anoles with various marking and color patterns. Most of the anoles sold in pet stores are wild caught in the Southern United States. Anoles are accustomed to very warm days and slightly cooler nights. They enjoy climbing branches and basking in the sunlight.

The information contained in this article will help acquaint you with your new anole and its basic needs. This will aid you in providing the best care for your pet as well as help you avoid many of the problems experienced by others who have kept anoles as pets. Your anole will be happier, healthier and will live longer as a result.

Housing

The primary goal of caging is to insure your anole's safety. The larger the cage, the better! The small plastic enclosures sold in most pet stores are too small to serve as living quarters. They should be considered traveling enclosures only. Be sure your anole has plenty of space in his enclosure that include branches to climb and places to hide. Anoles are more of a display animal and are best left alone. Too much handling of your anole will cause stress which leads to illness.

Glass aquariums with secure screen tops make the best enclosures for anoles. Choose an aquarium that is at least 20 gallons in capacity. Larger aquariums are even better. Provide non-toxic plants for your anole to hide under as well as tree branches for him to climb. In the wild, anoles are considered arboreal, or tree-dwelling. They will reward your attempts to provide as natural environment as possible by displaying behaviors typical of their counterparts in the wild.

Regular cleaning of the cage is very important. Uneaten food should be removed daily. The cage should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected at least once a week. The cage can be cleaned with a mild soap solution, and then disinfected with a solution of ½ cup

Clorox bleach to 1 gallon of water. Your local pet stores also carry cleaning solutions specifically designed for reptiles. Betadine, Nolvasan, and Roccal are other commercial products that are available for disinfecting. **MAKE SURE TO RINSE THE CAGE WELL**, and dry it thoroughly before returning the anole.

Props are very important for the well being of your anole. Logs, rocks, plants and branches (real or artificial) provide spaces to exercise and hide. It can be very stressful for an anole to have no place to hide. Rearrange the props in your pet's enclosure often to help prevent her from becoming bored. It is important that all props are cleaned on a regular basis.

Lighting

A UVA/UVB light should be used 10 or more hours per day all year long. Anoles that do not get the amount of UV light they need, lose bone density and become susceptible to multiple fractures (similar to osteoporosis in humans.)

Natural sunlight, when available, is preferred. Windows (glass) and aquariums filter out much of the beneficial sunlight. Placing the cage or aquarium with a screen top by an opened window or a **SAFE** place outside for a portion of the day is one option during warm weather. Your anole should always have a shaded area to use if he chooses. Giving your anole warm and cool areas in his enclosure allows him to regulate his body temperature.

An ultraviolet light that emits both UVA and UVB should be used year round. These bulbs will stop emitting the necessary UV rays long before the bulb itself burns out. Change the UV bulbs at least every six months to be sure your anole is getting the rays it needs. UV light is invisible! Your bulb may still emit visible light but not produce any UV light. Date your bulbs and change them every 6 months even if they are still emitting visible light. Note that fluorescent UV lights do not produce heat and must be used in addition to a heat source. Any lights should be placed where your anole cannot climb on or come in contact with them.

Bedding

Several types of bedding are available. Two recommended materials are paper and indoor/outdoor carpeting (this looks like artificial grass or turf and is washable). These products are easily obtained, clean, safe, and inexpensive. Although corncob, wood shavings, sand and gravel are commonly used as bedding material **WE DO NOT RECOMMEND THEM**. They are associated with multiple health problems. These products can be eaten by your reptile and result in an impaction that requires surgery to remove. Also, bacteria and fungi are able to grow in these substrates and dust from them can irritate the eyes and respiratory system of your anole. Shavings, corncob, sand, and gravel are also difficult to keep clean.

Diet

Anoles are folivores (leaf eaters) in the wild. They should be raised strictly on plant-based diets, with protein coming from a plant source also. Dark, leafy greens are the closest we can get to providing food that resembles the foliage they would consume in the wild. Rip the greens into pieces a little larger than the anole's head and serve them by themselves in a heaping pile. For fun and a natural feeding activity, hang a whole leaf from the top of the enclosure so that it dangles inside, and let the anole grab and tear at it as he would in the wild.

Anoles DO NOT require animal proteins (fish, poultry, beef, dairy, eggs, insects, etc). In fact, these foods can harm your pet's kidneys and, in the worst cases, cause death due to kidney failure.

We do not recommend feeding tofu to your anole. Although tofu is a plant based protein, it is high in fat and can impede calcium absorption. Tofu should not be fed on a regular basis, and when fed, done so only in very small quantities.

Anoles DO NOT need bird gravel. Please do not give it to them!

A basic anole diet should include the following; water cress, dandelion (including flowers), escarole, mustard greens (including flowers), collards, yellow wax beans, parsley, blackberries, turnip greens, green onions, and okra.

You may also feed alfalfa pellets (found in many rabbit foods) mixed with vegetables or fruits (which will break the pellets down due to their moisture content). Alfalfa pellets provide a good source of protein and calcium.

Other foods to supplement an anole's diet: apples, cantaloupe, kiwi fruit, cabbage, Napa cabbage, mango, raisins, squash, boiled rice, carrots, pasta, Brussels sprout, cereals low in sugar, raw or boiled mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, green beans, bananas, bok choy, radish, red/green/yellow bell peppers and kale.

None of the above supplemental items should be fed exclusively. A mixture of many is recommended. When fed in excess, vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprout, kale, cabbage, cauliflower, and bok choy can cause hypothyroidism (a thyroid deficiency). These vegetables may be fed in small amounts, in addition to the basic diet of fruits and vegetables.

Spinach, rhubarb, beets and chards are high in oxalic acid, and may cause gout over a period of time. Additionally, these foods bind calcium, effectively preventing the body from utilizing the dietary calcium. This can cause metabolic bone disease, a condition in which the bones lose their density and become prone to breaking.

Try to feed fresh vegetables as often as possible, as some of the green vegetables lose their thiamin as a result of being frozen. However, keep a bag of frozen mixed vegetables on hand in case of an emergency.

Fruits should compose the smallest part of the anole's diet. Most fruits are very low in calcium and often fairly high in phosphorus. Although anoles almost always accept bananas, they should not become the major component of their diet.

There are several edible flowers that you can grow yourself or buy in the produce section (not flower section) of the grocery store or plant nursery. Be sure that they have not been treated with pesticides of any kind. Edible plants include: hibiscus (flowers and leaves), nasturtium (flowers and leaves), rose petals, violets (flowers and leaves), and geraniums.

You may find that your anole has definite color and shape preferences when it comes to food. For example, he might pick collards as his favorite. The next foods you could try mixing in would be other dark green foods like parsley, broccoli, etc. If he likes carrots, try introducing sweet potato. Experiment! An anole that will not eat raw sweet potato, may eat cooked mashed sweet potato. Use a vegetable peeler to make shavings of food or chop into small pieces. Anoles prefer to swallow much of their food whole.

It is also recommended that a powdered reptile vitamin supplement be sprinkled over the food once weekly. A calcium supplement without phosphorus (e.g. Rep-Cal) should be given three or four times weekly.

Water

Water should be available to your anole at all times. A low-sided bowl or container is best. The container should be washed and fresh water given on a daily basis. In addition to a water bowl, your anole should be misted with water daily. Some anoles prefer to drink water droplets left on the sides of their enclosure.

Taking your Anole Outdoors

If you would like to bring your pet outside, there are a few things to consider. First, make sure that the temperature will be comfortable (70-90 degrees). Remember that your pet cannot regulate his body temperature by sweating or shivering the way we do. The only way your pet can warm or cool herself is by moving to a warmer or cooler location. Second, anoles can move with amazing speed when they want to! They can also climb very well. Finally, keep a close eye on your pet, and protect her from contact with predators such as dogs, cats, hawks, etc.

Recommended Exam Schedule

We recommend a yearly physical examination for your anole to be sure he is healthy. The signs of poor health in anoles can be subtle and if they are not recognized early, it can be too late to successfully treat a problem. Also, it is possible for anoles to get

internal parasites and have them for a long period of time before they display any symptoms. Because of this, we recommend a yearly fecal test. We also recommend a yearly blood test to check calcium and phosphorus levels. This will ensure that your anole's dietary needs are being met and will allow us to address any deficiencies before they cause a major problem such as metabolic bone disease.

Bathing

Anoles are great swimmers. Putting them in water a few times a week will not only give them exercise, it will help them to shed their skin appropriately during a shed. Warm water will stimulate a reptile to empty its bowels and bladder. This can be used on a constipated anole, or as part of a schedule to help prevent unwanted accidents. We recommend that you use a separate container for bathing your anole. Any reptile can carry salmonella bacteria and you do not want to expose yourself to it by using the same tub as your anole.

Clean your pet's tub and rinse it well before and after use. The water should be warm, not hot. Filling the tub 1/3 to 1/2 full should be adequate for a healthy anole. Never put a sickly or weak anole in water over its head. You may find your anole changes color when bathing. This is normal. Also, you may see him breathing or puffing more than usual. These are signs that he is adjusting to the temperature of the water.

Salmonella

Any reptile may be carrying salmonella, even animals that are perfectly healthy. Many reptiles are persistently infected. This means that they harbor the bacteria in their bodies and at times of stress begin to shed the bacteria into their environment. The most common sources of stress are inappropriate habitats and poor diet. If you follow the guidelines in this handout, you will be doing everything you can to keep your anoles healthy and stress-free. The healthier your pets are, the less the risk that they will shed salmonella.

It is safest, however, to assume that your reptile is always shedding salmonella. Be sure to wash your hands after handling your anole. It is especially important to supervise any small children. Prevent access to the enclosure when you are unable to watch them. Children and immunosuppressed individuals are at most risk of serious illness. Instruct older children of the importance of hand washing after touching a reptile or its habitat (ex. water, basking spot, or anything inside of the enclosure).

Other Diseases

Most diseases in anoles result from dirty enclosures, poor diets, and cool temperatures. Proper care of your anole will greatly reduce the incidence of disease. Diseases in anoles often come on very slowly. It can be difficult to detect these diseases before they become advanced.

Knowing what is normal for your anole is very important. Become familiar with your anole's normal appetite, activity level, amount and frequency of urination and defecation, appearance of waste products, and the general appearance of your reptile. A change in one of these normal behaviors may be a sign of disease. If you notice a change in your anole, observe him very closely. If the signs or symptoms persist for one or two days, or you notice new signs/symptoms, please call us for an appointment. The sooner we are able to address a problem, the more successful we will be in treating it. Bloody waste products, heavy breathing or panting, seizures, and lameness may suggest an emergency. Call us immediately if you notice any of the above.

Questions

Please call us at any time with questions or concerns regarding your anole. We are here to help you keep your pet happy and healthy for a lifetime!