

GECKO Friend or Foe?

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On Guam, this reptilian houseguest is either referred to by its Chamorro name, “guali’ek,” or by its Latinized name, “gecko.” In Latin, the word “gecko” means chirping lizard. Residents of Guam often hear the chirping sounds of these lizards in feverish pursuit of their mate or making sure that their territory is well protected from intruders.



Of course there is a certain liability to living with geckos. Most people can tolerate their chirping noises but have great difficulty dealing with copious droppings of the gecko. If a gecko finds an entrance inside a home, they will likely leave their fecal droppings in places that might make even the worst housekeeper scream. Geckos, unlike the cats or dogs, cannot be trained to go outside to relieve themselves.

People are either terrified of this miniature dinosaur-like creature or they find this lizard an amusing form of evening entertainment. For those who are terrified of geckos, it will be of little value to try to convince them otherwise. For them to witness a gecko climbing upside down on the ceiling wall is enough to induce the most terrified into utter hysterics.

Those who have a little more faith in Mother Nature may view these little creatures with utmost respect. They do what they do best – consume a large number of insect pests like moths, termites, cockroaches, ants, and other small arthropods – and are environmentally friendly.

In fact, the gecko is a very good friend to have living outside one’s home as a natural and helpful predator. The house gecko is carnivorous (a true meat eater) and its meat-loving characteristics are responsible for the reduction of moths, termites, and cockroaches from becoming even a greater nuisance around one’s residence.

To avoid cleaning their droppings off the wall and inside cabinets, drawers, and other sacred areas, it is advised to tighten up screens, doors, and windows and patch up cracks and crevices, especially around water and electric pipes, so these intrusive reptiles do not find their way inside.

If not afraid of geckos, one can pick them up gently and place them outside. Grabbing geckos by their tail, however, will make matters worse. Geckos have the ability to detach their tails, leaving one with only a small piece of their anatomy while the rest of them get away. This protective measure allows the gecko to escape from their enemies. Their tail will grow back. If one must kill geckos, use sticky cockroach or rodent traps rather than insecticides.

Geckos are attracted to lights where night flying insects gather. Most homes on Guam keep outside lights on during the night hours. An energized light bulb will attract numerous moths, while the meat-eating gecko will be there, filling its belly to full capacity.

The problem with geckos feeding at night on the outside walls of houses is that during the day, they will seek dark places to rest or mate, or for the female to lay her eggs. If screens, windows, or doors are not tightly sealed, they can easily move from the outside to the inside of homes. One possible solution in trying to reduce the numbers of geckos from gathering underneath outside lights is to use bug lights. Bug lights, available at hardware stores, are not 100% effective but they use a different spectrum of light that insects are not as attracted to as they are with most standard light bulbs.

For those pesky insects that reside outside your house, the guali'ek just might be the best friend you ever hope to have – they are inexpensive, they do not need any attention, and at times even quite musical. However, most will probably sleep better at night knowing that these little predatory lizards are doing their greatest benefit outside and not inside the home.

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