Introduction to Chameleons

Panther Chameleon - Chamaeleo pardalis
Originates from the northern part of Madagascar
Considered most colorful of the chameleons with many varieties from green to blue to red
Thrive in warm, humid climates
Very territorial, especially during breeding season

Veiled Chameleon - Chamaeleo calyptratus
Originates from the Yemen coast of Saudi Arabia
Considered one of the hardiest species of chameleons
Tolerate either extreme of temperature or humidity, despite their tolerance of extreme conditions, they do best somewhere in between
One of the most aggressive species; but docile towards humans

Jackson’s Chameleon - Chamaeleo jacksonii xantholophus
Originates from Kenya and Tanzania
The male has three horns protruding from his forehead
A true montane species coming from areas with temperate days and cool nights and therefore, should not get too hot or too dry

Housing
In general chameleons are territorial and should be housed individually
House in large enclosures with trees, branches or vines for climbing and to provide security
Separate from other chameleons visually, even when caged separately, the sight of another chameleon may cause extreme stress and predispose them to illness
An ideal cage size for an adult male is 2 ft long x 2 ft wide x 4 ft high
Use a vinyl coated, metal mesh cage covering as uncoated wire lead to rusting.
Hardware cloth and aluminum window screening are not recommended due to risk of injury
Safe potted plants include Ficus, Schefflera, Bogainvillaea and Hisbiscus. Other decorative plants include Ivy, Pothos or Ferns.
Plastic plants are preferred for ease of cleaning and hygiene
Avoid potentially toxic plants or trees.
Provide branches of varying size to mimic the natural environment and prevent foot injury
Overall cage design should provide a natural flow to allow basking/shade sites and water/food access

Lighting
Require ultraviolet B lighting (UVB lighting) for 12 – 16 hours per day
Change UVB bulbs every 6 months to ensure proper UVB ray emission
Maintain appropriate temperature with incandescent light bulbs or ceramic heat emitters

Known for beautiful arrays of colors and patterns and interesting behaviors, chameleons have become prevalent in pop culture and some of the most sought after reptiles.
Water
Must have access to a water source, preferably moving water
Mist the cage plants two to four times each day or provide a drip system
Humidity levels should be around 60-80 F and should be monitored with a hygrometer
Live plants aid in maintaining humidity level

Temperature
Chameleons come from various environments
Temperatures for Panthers and Veiled Chameleons range from 70 - 85 F
Temperatures for Jacksons range from 60-78 F and should not be above 82-84 F for long periods of time
Chameleons prefer a temperature drop of about 10 degrees at night and will bask in the mornings to raise their body temperature

Diet
Chameleons are omnivores that eat a varied diet of insects and smaller animals and plants
Insects should be “gut-loaded” with a commercial gut-loading diet and/or dusted with a calcium supplement each feeding and a multivitamin supplement once weekly
Chameleons can be hand fed individual insects or be placed in a container for feeding
Veiled chameleons, especially adult males, are unique in that they may supplement their water intake by eating plant material and may accept a small dish of leafy greens and vegetables

Handling/Behavior
In general chameleons are not pets amenable to handling as readily as other species such as bearded dragons
Most chameleons prefer to live alone
Males are very territorial, or protective of their living areas
Males and females tolerate each other only briefly during the mating season
When males with bony head horns fight over territory, horns are used to ram the other, but rarely cause injury

Excerpts from Dr. Rob Coke’s “Old World Chameleons: Captive Care and Breeding.”
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