

# Creating a Home for Lizards

## Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

### Encouraging Lizards to Visit Your Garden

Some lizards, such as the larger blue-tongue skinks, are commonly found in suburban gardens where there are rocks, open drains or piles of timber to provide them with shelter. They live on or near the ground, variously feeding on insects and snails which they find in leaf matter and amongst groundcover plants. They also eat plant material especially fruits and flowers like strawberries and cape weed.

Another common suburban lizard is the Marbled Gecko, a small grey arboreal gecko which loves to hunt spiders and insects on the walls of houses on warm evenings. Old sheets of iron or wooden sleepers are a favourite daytime hiding spot for Marbled Geckos.

### Lizards of South Australia

South Australia is home to approximately 180 lizard species. Reptile taxonomy often changes with new species regularly discovered.

The four current families are:

1. *Agamidae*, the Dragons, with 37 species;
2. *Gekkonidae*, the Geckos and Legless Lizards, with approximately 30 species of Gecko and 18 species of Legless lizard;
3. *Scincidae*, the Skinks, the largest family with almost 90 species; and
4. *Varanidae*, the Goannas, with 8 species.

### Habitat Requirements

Lizards require debris that provides shelter and refuge from predators through camouflage. Leave a good supply of leaves and twigs on the ground – this provides habitat for the insects the lizards use as a food source and also enable the lizards to move around safely. Leaving natural mulch on the ground will also attract micro-organisms that improve soil condition, act as a weed control, and help with saving water.

Hollow logs, crevices between bricks and rocks, groundcover plants and native grasses offer protection too, as well as a place to hibernate during the winter months.



Bluetongue lizards have hung on in our suburbs up to now but urban consolidation is reducing their available habitat. They are a welcome visitor in gardens where they will feed on slugs and bugs.

Lizards are cold-blooded and therefore rely on the sun to raise their body temperature. Incorporate flat, dark-coloured rocks into your garden landscape where they can be warmed by the sun, and make sure some shelter is near, so that sunning lizards can retreat if in danger. Elevate the rocks slightly, or put them in a little pile so the lizard can slip under it if threatened. A log or brick path will also absorb the warmth of the sun. Plant groundcovers near the edges to provide extra cover.

### Threats

A number of pressures threaten the viability of lizard populations. The primary threat is habitat loss through urban development. A trend toward manicured gardens and cleared spaces has led to a decrease in the availability of shelter, habitat and food resources.

Another major impact on lizard populations is predation by introduced animals including rats, cats, dogs, and foxes... as well as blackbirds – they are efficient predators of the smaller burrowing skinks!

### Water

Lizards get much of their moisture from their food and have very efficient bodies that lose little moisture through their skin. However they will readily drink if water is available, especially in hot weather.

## Chemical Use

Do not use any herbicides or pesticides as the latter are lethal to all insects which are food for your lizards. Avoid using snail pellets as snails that have consumed poison will be harmful to any lizard that eats them. The lizards in your garden are a natural pest control, as they will happily eat pesky slugs and other insects that love to munch on your garden.

## Did You Know?

Shinglebacks, also known as stumpy or sleepy lizards, live solitary lives when not breeding. They pair up to breed each spring with the same mate year after year. They have live young, usually only one or two, but the young can weigh as much as 35% of the adult's body weight. An equivalent human baby would weigh 50lbs (23 kg)!

Geckos are distinguished from other kinds of lizards by their distinct finger and toe pads used for climbing and their large eyes. They are usually active at night (nocturnal), especially the hours after sunset. Geckos also lay eggs with hard shells – usually at communal sites in early summer.



A Marbled Gecko on the lookout. Sharing your garden with these wonderful and harmless creatures is a sign that your yard is wildlife friendly.



Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government

## What can you do?

Have plenty of mulch, fallen logs and rocks for lizards to use. Also plant some low groundcovers that provide cover and food for lizards. Keep your cats and dogs inside, or fence off areas that they cannot access and provide safe habitat for lizards there.

If you have a strong interest in lizards you can contact *The South Australian Herpetology Group Inc* which is a group of people dedicated to the study and conservation of reptiles and amphibians through regular meetings, field trips, educational displays, talks and involvement with government and non-government conservation groups.

For more information call Gavin Kluske 0419 806 896 or visit [www.saherpgroup.com](http://www.saherpgroup.com).

## Why a Backyard for Wildlife?

In Australia, gardening has been recognised as one of our favourite pastimes and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By choosing to develop and maintain a garden that follows the five basic Backyards for Wildlife principles (see below), you can help contribute to a better local environment while at the same time conserve our local flora and fauna, create important habitat, reduce your maintenance costs, and reduce the threat of invasive environmental weeds.

### Backyards for Wildlife principles:

1. USE LOCALLY NATIVE PLANTS.
2. USE PLANTS THAT ARE A RANGE OF HEIGHTS.
3. PROVIDE FLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
4. MANAGE YOUR PETS RESPONSIBLY.
5. MINIMISE CHEMICAL USE.

Please consider applying some of these principles to your own backyard, so that together we can all help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.

## Find Out More

Visit [www.backyards4wildlife.com.au](http://www.backyards4wildlife.com.au) to access more Backyards for Wildlife and biodiversity information including an interactive map with lists of what grew in your suburb prior to 1836, a plant database and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.

## For further Information Contact

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