

Geckos fall into two groups: bright green geckos, or occasionally bright yellow, which are diurnal (active during the day), and grey or brown geckos with mottled, striped or banded patterns which are nocturnal (active at night). Geckos give birth to live young rather than laying eggs, are long-lived – up to 40 years and are omnivores, eating insects, berries and nectar. The geckos you may be lucky enough to see in your garden are:

Auckland green gecko (*Naultinus elegans elegans*)



The Auckland green gecko is bright green, sometimes with rows of yellow or cream blotches, or occasionally all bright yellow. The blue tongue is a distinguishing feature as is the versatile tail used as a fifth limb for balance and climbing. These geckos are arboreal, frequenting bushy plants and epiphytes. Stands of mānuka and kānuka are favoured locations.

Forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*)



The forest gecko's colour ranges from dark brown to pale grey, even green/yellow. This enables the gecko to blend in with its surroundings, making them difficult to see. They are active at night when they feed and will occasionally bask in the sun during the day.

Pacific gecko (*Dactylonemmis pacificus*)



Wide spread throughout the North Island, the Pacific gecko lives on the ground but will climb trees to forage. This gecko has mottled grey/brown shades.

Copper skink (*Oligosoma aeneum*)



This is one of the more common and widespread native skinks. Glossy in texture, it grows up to 10cm long, and is mainly active at night. This skink does not lay eggs but has live young.

Ornate skink (*Oligosoma ornatum*)



The ornate skink can be distinguished from the copper skink by its attractive white or yellowish and black "teardrop" marking below each eye. They like deep leaf litter, ground covers such as creeping fuchsia or rock piles and are highly territorial. Ornate skinks are mostly active around dawn and dusk (crepuscular) seldom emerging from cover.

Moko skink (*Oligosoma moco*)



The Moko skink is found on offshore islands but is also present on the mainland in isolated populations, the most significant in the Auckland region is Shakespear Regional Park. This skink is coppery or olive brown with dark brown stripe along the side, edged with cream or white.

Shore skink (*Oligosoma smithi*)



Restricted to the coast where they forage on the shoreline. Found widely on the mainland. Colour varies from entirely black to shades of grey, brown, green and sometime speckled.

Threats to lizards

- Predators – rats, mice, moreporks, cats, magpies, mynahs, starlings and kingfisher.
- Habitat loss – vegetation clearance, debris removal, insecticides.
- Rainbow skink (*Lampropholis delicata*) – this small egg-laying skink is greenish-brown or bronze with a shiny iridescence which gives it its name. It comes from eastern Australia, accidentally introduced in the 1960s. There are concerns that it may become a problem as it has in Hawaii, where it is called a "plague skink" and may out-compete the copper skink. Eggs have been found in potting mix and under plant pots. Please avoid using soil and plant material contaminated with rainbow skink eggs in your garden.

All native lizards are protected under the Wildlife Act, and may not be captured, collected or deliberately disturbed without a permit issued by the Department of Conservation. Generally lizards may only be kept in captivity or collected for scientific, educational or advocacy purposes. Getting to know the habits of these secretive creatures in your own lizard-friendly garden is a far more rewarding alternative.

Useful links

www.reptiles.org.nz
www.srnarnz.org.nz/lizardtoolkit

www.doc.govt.nz and search for; Skinks and geckos factsheet; Lizards in your garden factsheet; and rainbow skink factsheet.

Lizards alive in your garden



Photo: Forest gecko - Dylan van Winkel

Native lizards

Lizards are harmless creatures that help disperse seeds of some of our native plants and pollinate their flowers. New Zealand is home to more than 80 species of lizard. There are two types of native lizard: geckos with baggy, velvety skin and broad heads, and skinks with sleek, smooth skin. Although our native tuatara may look like a lizard, it is the only remaining species of a much older group of reptile that roamed the earth with the dinosaurs.

Encouraging lizards

Every gardener can make a difference by creating habitats for lizards to flourish. Lizards need places to hide. They need cover when hunting, feeding and resting and they need protection from extremes of heat and cold as well as from predators.

Ground dwelling lizards need crevices they can escape to from ground hunting nocturnal predators such as rats, mice, moreporks and cats. They like to squeeze into body-sized holes which can be provided by a pile of old bricks, rocks or pipes. The material isn't important but the number and size of crevices and cavities is. It is important these retreats are undisturbed.

To learn how to make a lizard home, visit www.doc.govt.nz and search 'attracting lizards to your garden.'



Dylan van Winkel

Lizards in your garden



Arboreal geckos need dense, divaricating shrubs, such as *Coprosma* and *Muehlenbeckia* species, so they can escape from diurnal predators such as magpies, starlings and mynahs.

- To encourage skinks in your garden, plant toe toe and *Carex* species.
- Allow vines to grow up walls and embankments so lizards can move three-dimensionally through your garden.
- Plant thickly, including ground-covers.
- Provide lots of debris such as rotting logs, bark chips, rock and boulder piles; and encourage plants to grow.
- Design stone walls, retaining walls or embankments that have plenty of small gaps, cracks and crevices.
- Keeping your garden free of rats and mice is of great benefit to lizards.



Food for lizards

Insects

- Ground cover plants, leaf litter and mulch will provide a suitable humid habitat for lizards and their invertebrate prey as well as improving water retention for plants.
- Minimise use of sprays to ensure insects thrive.
- Plants such as grasses and tussocks encourage insects.

Berries and nectar

Plant berry or nectar producing plants and try to provide a range of species for continuous supply of food throughout the year.



Auckland green gecko

Dylan van Winkel



Copper butterfly

Rob Sutsted

Table of flowering and fruiting food sources for lizards

Species	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April
<i>Hebe speciosa</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—				==	==	==	—	—
Kohekohe	==	==	==	==										
Pūriri	—	—	—	==	==	==	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mānuka						==	==	==	==					
<i>Parsonsia heterophylla</i>	==						==	==	==	==	==	==	==	
Karo							==	==	==	==				
Kānuka									==	==	==			
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>									==	==	==			
<i>Myoporum laetum</i>								==	==	==	==			
Cabbage tree								==	==					
Pōhutukawa										==	==			
Flax											==	==		
Rātā vine	==										==	==	==	
Kawakawa	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Māhoe	==								==	==	==	==	==	
Cabbage tree											==	==		
<i>Meuhlenbeckia</i> species	==	==								==	==	==	==	==
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>	==									==	==	==	==	
<i>Coprosma</i> species	==	==											==	==

== Main flowering/fruiting season
 — Intermittent flowering/fruiting