



# FOOD FOR LIZARDS



Richard Plinston

## INSECTS

- Mulch your garden heavily to improve water retention for plants and to provide a suitable humid habitat for lizards and their invertebrate prey.
- 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.



Table of flowering and fruiting food sources

SPECIES	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Nov	Oct	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April
<i>Hebe speciosa</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—				—	—	—	—	—
Kohekohe	—	—	—	—	—	—								
Puriri	—	—	—	—	—	—								
Manuka						—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maori jasmine	—						—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Karo							—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kanuka									—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>												—	—	—
Cabbage tree								—	—					
Pohutukawa										—	—			
Flax											—	—		
Rata vine	—										—	—	—	—
Kawakawa	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mahoe	—								—	—	—	—	—	—
Cabbage tree											—	—		
<i>Meuhlenbeckia</i> species	—	—								—	—	—	—	—
<i>Fuchsia procumbens</i>	—									—	—	—	—	—
<i>Coprosma</i> species	—	—											—	—

NECTAR

BERRIES

— main flowering/fruiting season  
 - intermittent flowering/fruiting

## THREATS TO LIZARDS

- Predators – rats, mice, moreporks, cats, magpies, mynahs, starlings
- 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 Hawai'i, 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 at nurseries so has the potential to be spread with nursery material.

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.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) and search for; Skinks and geckos factsheet; Lizards in your garden factsheet; and Attracting lizards to gardens in Canterbury brochure.

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/conservation/native-animals/reptiles-and-frogs/gardening-for-lizards.pdf>

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/conservation/native-animals/reptiles-and-frogs/garden-lizards-canterbury.pdf>

Gardening for lizards in the lower North Island  
[www.reptiles.org.nz](http://www.reptiles.org.nz)

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# LIZARDS ALIVE IN YOUR GARDEN



Dr Paddy Ryan



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.

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 kanuka are favoured locations.

Dr Paddy Ryan

**PACIFIC GECKO**  
(*Hoplodactylus pacificus*)

The pacific gecko lives on the ground but will climb trees.

**FOREST GECKO**  
(*Hoplodactylus granulatus*)

The forest gecko can change colour to match its surroundings, making it difficult to see. The colours range from dark brown to pale gray. They will occasionally bask in the sun but feed at night.

Dr Paddy Ryan

**Skinks seen in Auckland gardens include:**



A H Whitaker

**COPPER SKINK**  
(*Cyclodina aenea*)

This is one of the more common and widespread native skink.

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.



Andrew Morrison

**ORNATE SKINK**  
(*Cyclodina ornata*)



Mike Thorsen

**STRIPED SKINK**  
(*Oligosoma striatum*)

The rare striped skink is a tree-climber and lives beneath flaking bark and in crevices in trunks and branches. They can also be found in logs and ground litter. Striped skinks are found on Little and Great Barrier Islands but was reported from the Waitakere Ranges in the 1900s.

**MOKO SKINK**  
(*Oligosoma moco*)

The moko skink is found on islands off the east coast and is coppery or olive brown with dark brown stripe along the side, edged with cream or white.



Dr Paddy Ryan



**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.

See (doc link) on how to make an onduline lizard home:  
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/native-animals/reptiles-and-frogs/lizards/attracting-lizards-to-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.

**GENERALLY IN THE GARDEN:**

- 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.

