Some simple rules for attracting lizards

Plant thickly, including thick ground-covers and vines to create safe habitats that lizards can retreat to when predators threaten.

Plant berry- or nectar-producing species, especially natives, and try to get a range of species to ensure a continuous supply of food throughout the year.

Mulch your garden heavily—it will improve water retention for plants and also create a humid environment for lizards (especially the genus Cyclodina) and their invertebrate prey.

Try growing organically or minimise the use of sprays to ensure that insect populations thrive.

Provide lots of debris such as rotting logs, bark chips, layered rocks, boulders, untreated timber, corrugated iron and firewood, and encourage plants to grow around it.

Allow vines to grown up walls or steep embankments to reach the top to ensure animals can easily move up and down

Design stone walls, retaining walls or embankments that have plenty of small gaps, cracks and crevices and encourage plants and vines to grow on them.

Discourage cats from your garden. Plant thickly so they can't access the area. Consider not replacing your cat.

Lizards in your garden

How to attract and keep them

Eight lizard species live in the Wellington area making it one of the most diverse of New Zealand urban landscapes. Some live happily alongside us without our knowing, others are declining due to habitat loss and fragmentation and predation by cats, birds and mammals. Every gardener in Wellington can make a difference by creating habitats for lizards to flourish.

Encouraging lizards

To encourage lizards into your garden you need a basic understanding of their needs, their behaviour, and then have plenty of patience before you will see them return. Learn about the species and create habitat that they love. It won't take much effort, lizards love messy and untidy gardens!

Cats and lizards are incompatible so if you have a cat, you'll need to make extra efforts to ensure there's plenty of secure cover where lizards can forage and hide. Trapping predators such as rats and possum will also be a great benefit.

Some lizards, especially *Cyclodina* species, are active at night and like moist humid sites and avoid hot dry north facing slopes where you're more likely to find the *Oligosoma* species.

Lizards need places to hide. They need cover when hunting, feeding and resting and they need protection from predators and extremes of heat and cold. Create crevices and cover using natural objects or any non-toxic material (e.g., old building material, concrete, old roofing iron). The material isn't important, it's the retreat sites you're creating—lizards like to squeeze into body sized holes and they like plenty of them.

Mown lawns, open paths and nicely weeded open flower beds are unsuitable for lizards.

Many lizards are also territorial so create enough habitat for all the animals. Try not to disturb habitat too much, if they're forced from their territory they may have no other place to go and will find it difficult to survive.

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Te Papa Atawhai

Wellington's lizards

Common skink
(*Oligosoma nigriplantare polychroma*)

Common; around much of the Wellington region.

Photo: Colin Roderick.

Brown skink
(*Oligosoma zelandicum*)

Scattered throughout Wellington from Johnsonville to Karori and south to Island Bay. Not abundant.

Photo: Rod Morris.

Copper skink
(*Cyclodina aenea*)

A handful of records exist for Wellington, Hutt Valley and east of the harbour.

Photo: Richard Parrish.

Ornate skink
(*Cyclodina ornata*)

There are few records in Wellington but they are known to be locally abundant in some areas including from a line across central Wellington to Karori north, and through most suburbs to Johnsonville (south of State Highway 1).

Photo: Jeremy Rolfe.

Common gecko
(*Hoplodactylus maculatus*)

Widespread; scattered along the southern coast including inland on the old coastal scarps.

Photo: Andrew Morrison.

Marlborough mini
(*H.* "Marlborough mini")

A coastal species, similar in appearance to common geckos. Only recently identified and found between Houghton Bay and Sinclair Head.

Southern North Island forest gecko
(*H.* "southern North Island")

Little is known about its distribution but especially found in the forested hill country throughout Wellington.

Photo: Andrew Morrison.

Wellington green gecko (*Naultinus elegans punctatus*)

Found in most suburbs of Wellington city, Petone, Lower and Upper Hutt, especially in forested areas. A few records from Tawa, Haywards, Whitby and Judgeford.

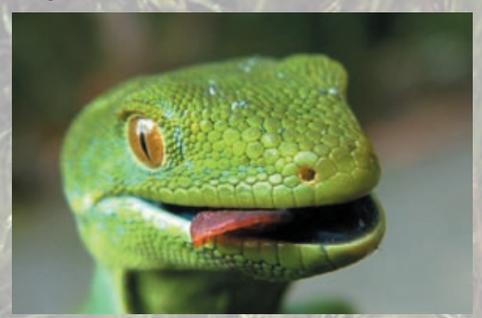


Photo: Bryan Welch.

Background image: Wellington green gecko. Photo: Rod Morris.

Plants that lizards love

The following plants are some of the species that are native to the region and suitable for attracting lizards into Wellington gardens. For more information about these and other plants see www.nzpcn.org.nz

Divaricating shrubs for complexity and height

Small-leaved pohuehue, scrub pohuehue (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*)

Shrubby tororaro (*Muehlenbeckia astonii*)

Thick-leaved mahoe (*Melicytus crassifolius*)

Species to give protection from predators

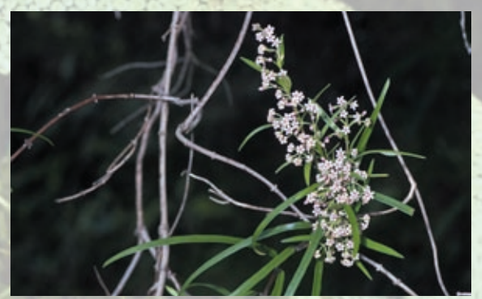
Matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*)

Speargrass (*Aciphylla squarrosa*)

Shrubby tororaro (*Muehlenbeckia astonii*)

Vines to connect habitats

New Zealand clematis (*Clematis foetida*, *C. paniculata*, *C. forsteri*)



Kaihua, New Zealand jasmine (*Parsonsia capsularis*, *P. heterophylla*)

Climbing rata (*Metrosideros perforata*, *M. fulgens*)

Thick ground covers for retreat sites

Ferns (*Asplenium*, *Blechnum*, *Adiantum*, *Doodia* species)

Tussock grasses and sedges (*Carex*, *Chionochloa*, *Poa*, *Festuca* species)

Rengarenga (*Arthropodium cirratum*)

Pinatoro, New Zealand daphne (*Pimelia prostrata*, *P. arenaria*)

Shore spurge (*Euphorbia glauca*)

Fuchsia (*Fuchsia perscandens*)

Clump forming species to create debris

Flax (*Phormium tenax* or *P. cookianum*)

Cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*)

Pukio or swamp sedge (*Carex virgata*)

Astelia (*Astelia fragrans*, *A. grandis*, *A. solandri*)

Food species

Nectar: Rātā species (*Metrosideros robusta*, *M. fulgens*)

Nectar: Flax (*Phormium tenax*, *P. cookianum*)

Nectar: Mānuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*)

Nectar: Koromiko (*Hebe stricta* var. *atkinsonii*)

Fruit: Kawakawa (*Macropiper excelsum*)

Fruit: Coprosma species (e.g., *Coprosma repens*, *C. propinqua*)

Fruit: Porcupine shrub (*Melicytus crassifolius*)

Fruit: Small-leaved pohuehue, (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*)

Fruit: Nikau (*Rhopalostylis sapida*) (pollen)

Plant photos: Jeremy Rolfe.