

Attracting lizards to your garden

Lizards/kāraara are an important yet often unseen part of our native biodiversity. New Zealand is home to more than 80 species of lizard. There are two different types. **Geckos** have baggy, velvety skin with broad heads. **Skinks** are sleek and smooth-skinned, resembling small snakes with legs. While feared by some Māori, lizards are harmless creatures that help disperse the seeds of some of our native plants, and may also pollinate their flowers.

Lizards can thrive in suburban gardens and rural properties in Canterbury if their needs for food and shelter are met. Their thrifty diet of small invertebrates is easily supplemented by planting fruit-bearing shrub and vine species. Divaricating shrubs such as *Coprosma propinqua*, *C. crassifolia*, *Melicytus alpinus*, *Muehlenbeckia astonii*/shrubby tororaro and some vines like pōhuehue (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*) are especially popular with lizards. Tussocks deserve a mention too, as they attract a variety of small insects. Plants and advice on how to grow them can be obtained from your local native plant nursery.

M. Leinink



Divaricating shrubs like this Coprosma or mikimiki have tightly-interlaced branches and tasty berries.



Skinks



Common skinks/mokomoko (left) have urban savvy and may be found in some Christchurch gardens. Photo: A. Trowbridge

All South Island skinks (*Oligosoma* species) are active by day, foraging or basking in warm sunny spots.

Being shy creatures of habit, their ideal piece of real estate would have plenty of undisturbed cover, piles of loosely-stacked rocks, stones, tiles or bricks for basking and a predator-free environment.

All introduced mammals (cats, mustelids, hedgehogs and rodents) and some birds, such as magpies and starlings, eat lizards. In fact, most people only realize they have lizards on their property when their cat brings one home!



R. Smith

Porcupine shrub (*Melicytus alpinus*)



Geckos

Green geckos (*Naultinus* species) are active by day, and inhabit native shrubland and forested areas. Brown geckos (*Hoplodactylus* species) are nocturnal (active at night) and sometimes take up residence in wood-piles, old sheds and houses. They will readily use artificial cover like roofing iron, timber, and piles of concrete blocks or tiles. When adding cover, it is important to leave dry and dark lizard-sized gaps (no more than 5–10 mm) they can squeeze themselves into (see overleaf). Geckos may signal their presence by leaving ghostly-white shed skins or tell-tale dark droppings that have a white cap of uric acid at one end.



Canterbury geckos/moko-pāpā (left) will readily use artificial cover and like to squeeze themselves into small spaces.

Photo: A. Trowbridge

R. Smith



Pōhuehue (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*) is a wiry vine that attracts invertebrates and lizards alike.



Making an Onduline lizard home

Onduline is an extremely tough lightweight corrugated roofing and cladding product made from organic fibres saturated with bitumen. Check the manufacturer's website for a local supplier – (<http://www.onduline.co.nz/distributors.htm>).

Sheets are two metres long and can be cut into smaller pieces (290 mm x 400 mm or larger) with a handsaw or skillsaw. These should be stacked two- or three-high with small stones in between the layers. Place your lizard home in a warm dry sunny area with good cover such as divaricating shrubs, tussocks and rock piles. Once in place do not disturb your lizard home. Prospective tenants will abandon habitat that is frequently disturbed.



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

For more information about local and NZ lizards see:

DOC website: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/Conservation/001~Plants-and-Animals/001~Native-Animals/Lizards/index.asp>

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Cover photo:
Kānuka is popular
with the arboreal (tree-
dwelling) jewelled
gecko/moko-kākāriki

A Trowbridge

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Options for Canterbury



Department of Conservation
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