

# Lizards in the Garden

New Zealand gardens host a variety of lizards and  
**TONY WHITAKER** tells how to attract them.



Green Gecko



Common Gecko

For most suburbanites the first evidence there are lizards in the neighbourhood is when the family puss coughs up a pile of mutilated corpses on to the shag-pile. After cleaning up the mess the curious will wonder where they came from because, for most people, lizards are the unseen inhabitants at the bottom of the garden.

Yet, with more than 70 recognized species, New Zealand has one of the highest diversities of lizards of any temperate area on earth. There are 37 geckos (baggy-skinned lizards) and 35 skinks (smooth-skinned species) occupying various habitats from the shore to more than 2,000 metres up the mountains. It is hardly surprising, then, that at least some have been able to adapt to life in urban environments.

Not for us, however, are those translucent house geckos boldly running upside-down across the ceiling as in the tropics, or gathering in noisy groups around the lights at night. Instead, our lizards are rather secretive and timid creatures, more comfortable well out of sight, in dense vegetation, beneath leaf litter or hiding in the dark recesses of our houses. Nevertheless, in total, 12 species of gecko and at least seven species of skink have been reported from suburban environments (see box opposite) though some of these are rare in such places.

The lizard species inhabiting suburban environments vary in different parts of the country, but most are skinks.

Throughout the North Island, the secretive *Cyclodina* species can be found, largely nocturnal and occupying overgrown, damper sites. Their presence is usually detected when debris or dense vegetation is cleared.

In the southern North Island and the

*The geckos on these two pages may occur in New Zealand gardens. Geckos are baggy-skinned lizards. The smooth-skinned lizards of the garden, known as skinks, are shown overleaf.*

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