



Ball Pythons, Boa Constrictors, Corn Snakes

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

Ball Python (*Python regius*): Also known as the Royal Python, is a ground dwelling, non-venomous snake native to the savannas and rain forests in western Africa, in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. They are called a ball python because they curl into a tight ball when stressed. Life expectancy is 12-14 years. Adult length: males 5 feet, females 3 feet.

Temperature range: 75°-85°F

Humidity: 30-70%

Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor*): The boa constrictor is found throughout Central America, Northern Mexico, and South America north of the Amazon Basin. Boa constrictors live from sea level to 3,300 feet (1,000 m) elevation, in tropical rainforests, semi-deserts, rocky hillsides, savannas, and near cultivated fields and homes. They climb well, and forest-dwelling boas spend a lot of time in the trees. Boa constrictors can swim, but most do not spend significant time in the water.

Boa constrictors will eat almost anything, including rodents, large birds, coatis, iguanas, other snakes, possums, and bats. They have even been known to eat small deer. There are over 50 color and pattern morphs available in the pet trade, but in general, they are brown and cream and have a dark stripe that runs from the jaw to the eye. Life expectancy is 20-25 years. Adult length: 10-14 feet. Weight: 50-100 lbs.

Temperature range: 80°-90°F

Humidity: 75-80%

Corn Snake (*Elaphe guttata*): Also known as Red Rat Snake. The corn snake is found throughout the Southeastern and Central United States, as well as parts of Mexico. The name 'corn snake' refers to the splotched pattern on its belly, which resembles Indian maize. Corn snakes are non-venomous, and are often found in fields where they hunt for small rodents. Corn Snakes tend to be quite secretive and appear mostly at night (nocturnal) or during the twilight hours (crepuscular). Life expectancy is 10-12 years. Adult length: 3-5 feet.

Temperature range: 75°-85°F

Humidity: 40-60%

DIET

Protein: Frozen or pre-killed mice, rats, or rabbits. Warm frozen prey up to room temperature by leaving it out overnight or placing it in warm (not hot!) water. Bites from prey are common and can be deadly, so do not feed live prey!

ENVIRONMENT

Snakes should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide.

Lighting: It is recommended that all species of snakes have a full spectrum light to set their photoperiod. We recommend using a full-spectrum bulb, the **Reptisun 5.0 or 10.0, manufactured by ZooMed**. Leave UVB bulbs on for 14 hours a day, and make sure that the bulb is not filtered through glass or plastic.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs. There should be a temperature gradient, which varies depending on species. Keep a thermometer at basking level on the hot end of the enclosure, and at ground level on the cool end. Never use heat rocks and avoid heating pads, as these can cause severe burns.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Coconut fiber is also ok. Provide branches or vines as well.

Moisture: Humidity varies depending on species. For snakes needing a high humidity (at least 80%), mist at least 2-3 times daily, and place a large dish of water on the warm end of the enclosure. In some cases, a humidifier will be necessary to bolster humidity. To read humidity, keep a humidistat or hygrometer in the enclosure. Also provide a large dish of water for soaking and defecating. Ideally, the dish should be large enough for the snake to completely submerge. Change the water often.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring snakes in for an exam once a year. The veterinarian might recommend blood work or fecal exams.

Common Illnesses:

Respiratory Infection: Caused by inadequate temperatures. Symptoms include: decreased appetite, discharge from mouth or nose, wheezing, breathing with mouth open, lethargy. Treatment involves administering oral or injectable antibiotics.

Burns: Caused by heat pads, heat rocks, or heat lamps placed too close to basking area. Symptoms include: raw skin, or scabbing. Treatment involves removing necrotic skin and administering oral or injectable antibiotics and applying antiseptic or burn cream to the affected area.

Ulcerative stomatitis (Mouth Rot): Usually caused by inadequate temperatures or by feeding live prey. Symptoms include: decreased appetite, lethargy, mouth or jaw disfigurement. Diagnosis is obtained by doing a thorough oral exam. Treatment involves cleaning the mouth and administering oral or injectable antibiotics, and raising the temperature of enclosure.

Surface Mites (*Ophionyssus natricis*): Usually contracted from other snakes or shavings. Symptoms include: difficulty shedding, skin discoloration, and small specks on skin. Mites are often visible. Treatment involves administering antiparasitic medication.