



Ball Pythons, Boa Constrictors, and 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 rainforests of 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 males reach a length of approximately 3 feet and females 5 feet.

Temperature: 88-90°F at basking level and no less than 75°F on the cool end.

Humidity: 30% to 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 ft (1,000 meters) elevation, in tropical rainforests, semi-deserts, rocky hillsides, savannas, and near cultivated fields and homes. They climb well, and forest-dwelling species boas spend a lot of time in the trees. Boa constrictors can swim, but most do not spend significant time in the water. Life expectancy is 20-25 years. Adults reach a length of 10 to 14 feet and can weigh 50 to 100 lbs.

Temperature: 90°F at basking level and no less than 80°F on the cool end.

Humidity: 75% to 80%

Corn Snake (*Elaphe guttata*): Also known as the Red Rat Snake. Corn snakes are 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 Native American 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 and adults may reach 3 to 5 feet in length.

Temperature: 85°F at basking level and no less than 75°F on the cool end.

Humidity: 40% to 60%



DIET

Frozen/thawed or pre-killed mice, rats, or rabbits. Feed once to twice weekly on a consistent schedule. Warm frozen prey up to room temperature by leaving it out overnight or placing it in warm (not hot!) water.

NEVER FEED LIVE PREY! Bites from prey are common and can cause severe injury.

ENVIRONMENT

Snakes should be kept in an enclosure that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide. A temperature gradient should be created by placing heat emitters on one end of the enclosure.

UVB Lighting: It is recommended that all species of snakes have full spectrum light to set their photoperiod. We recommend using 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. These bulbs must be changed every 6 months because their effectiveness as a UVB emitter decreases over time.

Heat: Use ceramic heat emitter bulbs and leave these on 24/7 to maintain appropriate temperatures. Avoid red heat lamps. Studies have shown reptiles have the ability to see red light, and this will interfere with their photoperiod. Never use heat rocks or under-tank heat pads as these can cause severe burns!

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.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Coconut fiber is also okay if it is allowed to dry completely after the initial wetting.

MEDICAL CARE

Bring snakes in once a year for an annual health check. The veterinarian may recommend bloodwork or fecal testing for parasites. Try to avoid feeding your snake for 24 to 48 hours prior to your visit to prevent regurgitation from the stress of travel.

Common Illnesses:

- a) **Respiratory Infections:** Caused by inadequate temperatures. Symptoms include: decreased appetite, discharge from mouth or nose, wheezing, breathing with mouth open, and lethargy. Testing involves taking oral cultures to isolate pathogens. Snakes are typically treated with injectable antibiotics.
- b) **Burns:** Caused by heat pads, heat rocks, or heat lamps placed too close to the basking area. Symptoms include: raw skin or scabbing. Treatment involves removing necrotic skin and administering injectable antibiotics along with topical antiseptics and burn cream.
- c) **Ulcerative Stomatitis (Mouth Rot):** Usually caused by inadequate temperatures or by feeding live prey. Symptoms include: decreased appetite, lethargy, and mouth or jaw disfigurement. Diagnosis is obtained by doing a thorough oral exam. Treatment involves cleaning the mouth and administering injectable antibiotics and ensuring the enclosure is at the appropriate temperature range.
- d) **Surface Mites (*Ophionyssus natricis*):** Usually contracted from other snakes. Symptoms include: difficulty shedding, skin discoloration, and small specks on the skin. Mites are often visible to the naked eye. Treatment involves administering antiparasitic medication.

Bring your snake to a veterinarian right away if it is showing any of the following symptoms:

Diarrhea or inability to pass stool

Difficulty breathing

Weight loss

Extreme lethargy

Loss of appetite