



Ridgeway

CARE & SET-UP SHEETS

ROYAL (BALL) PYTHONS



For this care sheet we will focus on Ball Pythons. However with a tiny bit of adaptation with humidity and temperature, this sheet will offer a rough guide to many common species of Python and Boa.

Pythons and Boas require an enclosure that is large enough that when the tank measurements of length and width are added together it is approximately the length of your snake. For example a 1.5m snake requires an enclosure 1m x 50cm x 50cm.

Be careful not to use a vivarium that is more than twice the suggested size, as it can put some snakes off feeding. You will need a small environment for a juvenile and to upgrade the enclosure size as it grows.

Despite the popularity of rack/tub systems, we will not cover these here in this care sheet. This particular style of set up needs careful research as to the pros and cons as well as a good background knowledge of husbandry, if it is to work for you and your animal long term.

However, it is worth pointing out that simply putting a baby Ball Python in a small plastic tub will not suffice. While consideration may have been given to the required space, most peoples homes do not offer enough background heat for a heat mat to effectively heat the animal enclosure. Unless however, the tub is in a well insulated and controlled rack system.

Vivarium Set-Up

Your snake requires a non light emitting heat source from above that can remain on 24 hours a day. A well guarded ceramic bulb or DHP controlled by thermostat will work best.

All heating should be positioned at one end of your vivarium to create a basking area. Your thermostat sensor and thermometer should be placed on the floor in the middle of your vivarium and be reading 30c/85f. Basking temperatures should be approximately 35c/95f - 40c/104f. Alternatively, your sensor can be set at 35c/95f at the warm end wall on the floor, provided you are still achieving the desired 30c/85f in the middle.

Useful tip.

When positioning hides and decor in the environment, always allow space directly under the heating element to allow the heat to reach the floor. This will help your vivarium function more efficiently, prevent super high temperature build up around the bulb and stop the floor from becoming cold. Although IR light is invisible to us it still reflects off a surface. It is still important to place hides etc around the enclosure. We would suggest they are placed just off centre of your heating source.

For lighting we suggest the shade dweller pro T5 unit. This will benefit the animal and allow you to see it, but without the high levels of harsh UVA.

Substrate, Cleaning And Tank Furniture

Orchid bark or coconut husk is the suggested substrate (floor covering), but Lignocil and aspen bedding are equally effective. The bark and husk allow for a small amount of humidity and the odd spraying to maintain it, especially around shedding time. Be careful when selecting a dry substrate that your snake does not have shedding problems. Be equally aware that a lot of these snakes do not like overly damp/wet environments for prolonged periods of time, as it can cause skin and respiratory problems.



While common boas like a moderate to high humidity, Ball Pythons prefer a moderate humidity. Like with temperature, a gradient is required for humidity too. Instead of keeping the whole environment damp to maintain humidity across the whole enclosure, it is better to provide the animal with lots of hides with varying levels of humidity.

Spread the substrate evenly across the bottom of the tank at a depth of approximately 3-6cm. It should be spot cleaned regularly and fully replaced every 6 weeks. Do not use household cleaning fluids as many are toxic. Use only disinfectants designed specifically for reptiles.

Provide your animal with a water bowl big enough to fit your snake inside. Normal tap water is fine and you should only fill your water bowl up a quarter of the way to prevent it from overflowing, should the animal try to fit its whole body in.

Hides and decor are extremely important. A great deal of snakes, especially Ball Pythons, need tight spaces and solid surfaces to feel secure. Ball pythons specifically are what is known as 'positively thigmotactic'. This essentially means the animal likes to wedge its self in to tight and solid places, as well as the feeling of contact with solid surfaces as it moves about its enclosure. Ball Pythons won't always be just content with a light weight plastic hide. When threatened they push out against the sides of a hide to prevent from being pulled out, so the more surface it has contact with as well as the more solid and heavier the hide, the safer it feels. This is why we often see the animals wedging themselves under a heavy bowl after pushing out the substrate or on top of a plastic hide in a rack, because the surfaces it is in contact with feel more secure by comparison to the loose hide it is given the choice to sit under.

Provide them with plenty of hide choices. Because of their compulsion to feel secure in a tight space, options are essential to suit your individual animal. Don't forget to change the hides as it grows and don't jump up through the hide choices too quickly. If you weren't to provide a suitable hiding place they like, in the right places, the animal for example might choose a spot between the wall and water bowl in the cool end. Because it feels insecure elsewhere the animal could become cold, choosing safety over the required temperature to feed.

Only use substrate and vivarium furniture from a reputable source and all heavy vivarium furniture should be securely positioned so it does not fall and hurt your animal.

Useful tip.

Reptiles need to feel safe in their home. We don't just add tank furniture, hides etc for stimulation. Caves and hides alone are not the only way to make them feel safe. Every time you put a new log or ornament in the animals enclosure it will make your animal feel safer. It offers the animal another area it no longer needs to watch for predators and another pocket of safety. By contrast, despite the misconception that less hides means you'll see the animal more, the truth is that most will likely feel vulnerable in such an open space and fail to come out much at all. When planning your new enclosure, don't forget to allow plenty of space for furniture if you want your animal to be happy and active.

Feeding

Only use quality defrosted rodents like those from Ridgeway Frozen and Ridgeway Exotics. Make sure it is always thoroughly thawed before feeding. Do not attempt to defrost your rodent in the microwave or in water. Offer your snake one rodent via feeding tongs every 7 days, if it refuses to take, leave it in the vivarium overnight. If it still has not eaten try again the following week. All left over food the following day should be thrown away and not re-frozen.

When selecting a food size it should be big enough to create a small lump in your snake's belly or be at least the width of your snake's belly. If your snake becomes overweight and begins to show fatty lumps under the skin, start feeding your animal less often. Every 14-21 days should be fine or provide far smaller food on the normal routine. Once growth slows down, less food is often needed, and watching the animal doesn't become overweight is very important. Consult an expert if you are unsure of the size/quantity of food required.

Larger snakes like some adult Boas and Burmese pythons will require much larger food. Rabbits are most commonly used. Due to the size of the meal it is suggested you only feed your snake every 2-4 weeks to prevent obesity.

Food choice is often up to you but your animal can be picky. Some will start the smaller juveniles on mice, moving to the larger rodents like rats as it grows. We personally use Multimammates. These are a great rodent and the best food for Ball Pythons of any size.

If your snake stops feeding, try warming the food on a plate above hot water until the food is above room temperature, then offer it to your snake. Also consider the size of its current environment and keeping your snake in a smaller home while you grow it a little more. Until your animal is feeding routinely again, remove all aspects of interaction.

Never handle your snake until the visible lump created from feeding has gone.

Health And Handling

If you are ever in doubt about the health of your snake, call your supplier, and if you are still in doubt, go and see a recommended specialist veterinarian. Below is a brief guide to help you know what to look for in a sick snake.

- Prolonged lack of appetite
- Runny and bubbly nose
- Excess mucus around the mouth
- The skin giving a wrinkled or dehydrated appearance
- Mouth not closing properly
- Dull or unclear eyes (when not shedding)
- Inability to right its self or dizzy appearance



During shedding, your snake's eyes will glaze over and its body colour will appear duller, this appearance will last up to a week, before it sheds. Always check your snake after it sheds to make sure all of the skin has come off. If your snake does not shed completely, call your supplier or a vet for advice on how to remove the un-shed skin. Around the time of your snake shedding, it is quite common for your snake to stop feeding and/or become very aggressive. Minimise the time spent with your animal to prevent stress or injury. Pay particular attention to the eyes after shedding. Sometimes a cap of old skin can remain and will need to be removed. If the eye is dull, wrinkled or has a ring of dry white skin around it, consult an expert for more advice. Do not ever attempt to remove an eye cap without the required experience.

After introducing your snake to the vivarium, be sure not to handle it until it has had 3-4 consecutive feeds. This will give you a good indication that your snake has settled in to its new

environment. Failure to do this could result in your new snake not feeding or becoming aggressive.

When it comes to handling a Python or Boa it is a very good idea not to immediately approach the snake when entering the vivarium. Ask the person selling you the animal to show you the best approach. Often it is just a case of being confident and not going straight towards the head. If the snake seems nervous or you need to give yourself some confidence, use a snake stick to let the snake know you are there and then gently push the snake's head away from you. Then gently support the middle of the snake's body and bring it out of the tank all the time keeping the snake's head facing in the other direction.

Always remember Pythons and Boas are very sensitive to their surroundings, especially the smell of food, body warmth and fast movements that may startle it, especially, if waved around its head. Any of these can evoke an uncharacteristic reaction, e.g. biting or striking.

To summarise, Ball Pythons are a great first snake. There's a huge amount of choices with colours, they are simple to keep and often very laid back. With males at only 4ft and females at only 6ft they are a safe and manageable size too. As with any pet, research is key. Especially the long term commitment of a snake. Start with smaller species, work your way to larger species if that's your desired goal. Learn what you can from the small animals and if you want the challenge of something larger like a Red tail boa then you'll be well prepared, before moving on to the giants. Alternatively stick with the Ball Pythons. There's now 1000's of colours and patterns to choose from so something to suit the whole family.

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