

Ball Python Care Sheet



Biological Facts

- Ball Python (also known as Royal python), *Python regius*
- Constrictor, non-venomous
- Natural habitat is savannah, grassland, and sparsely wooded areas.
- Smallest of the African pythons.
- May grow 3-4 ft (91-122 cm) long; rarely exceed 5 ft (152 cm)
- Stocky build; average adult weight 3-4 pounds, can exceed 7 pounds (3175 gm)
- Life span: average 20-30 years with proper care
- Origins: Africa

Behavior

- Shy species that will coil around its head and into a ball when frightened
- Nocturnal. Prefers to hunt at night with the aid of heat pits on the upper jaw.
- Rests during the day in underground burrows in the wild. In captivity, needs one or more “hide boxes” or may become stressed.
- Can be finicky eaters, and occasionally go several months between meals. This may be normal, but should be investigated if significant weight loss occurs.

Diet

- Young snakes typically eat baby mice and rats (“pinkies”, “fuzzies”, or “hoppers”).
- Adults will consume adult mice and small rats. The size of the prey item should approximate the width of the snake at the largest part of its body.
- Live prey can and will bite and scratch the snake causing severe damage and even death, regardless of the snake’s size. Never leave a live rodent in the cage with your snake unsupervised or for longer than 5-10 minutes
- Frozen-thawed mice and rats are safer and less expensive; they can be bought in bulk, and are stored more easily than live ones. Frozen rodents can be purchased online and at most pet stores.
- Fresh water daily in a clean bowl.

Environment

- Clean, well ventilated cage free of sharp edges or points. Enclosure must provide adequate room to move around (e.g. a 30 gallon/113.5 liter glass aquarium would be suitable for most adult ball pythons).
- Cage should have a cool end that is 80-85°F (26.7-29.4°C) and a warm end that is 90-95°F (32.2-35°C), so the snake can thermoregulate.
- Under-tank heating pads or ceramic heat emitters are preferred. Avoid hot rocks or direct contact with heat sources of any kind, as they can cause severe burns.

- Humidity should be maintained at 50-60% through regular misting of the cage, covering a portion of the cage top, and placing an aquarium air stone in the water bowl.
- Provide two hide boxes, one at the warm end of the cage and another at the cool end, to minimize stress. Hide boxes should be designed so the snake can be easily removed from its hiding place, if necessary.
- Newspaper, paper towels, and reptile carpeting are highly recommended as cage substrates.
- Natural substrates such as aspen shavings, cocoanut fiber, and pine bark are more cosmetic in appearance, but occasionally cause problems if ingested. Cedar and pine shavings can irritate a snake's respiratory tract and should be avoided.
- Monitoring is best done using a reptile thermometer and humidity gauge (more accurate than the "rainbow" aquarium stickers)

Preventive Care

- Complete physical examination every 6-12 months
 - Consult a veterinarian with experience treating reptiles if you have any questions or concerns about your snake's health.
- Annual fecal exam for parasites (especially if feeding live prey)
- Ticks and mites are best treated by an experienced, exotic veterinarian.

Common Medical Disorders

- Respiratory infection
- Prey-induced trauma
- Anorexia
- Parasites
- Burns
- Infection of oral cavity ("mouth rot")
- Retained shedding