

Signs of Illness

Monitoring your snake's appearance is important and can often indicate signs of illness such as open mouth breathing, wheezing, excess salivation, swelling, nasal discharge, problems shedding, refusing to eat, excess salivation, lesions or the presence of parasites. When such signs surface, it is important for you to contact a veterinarian to treat your snake.

General Care

It is easy to see that it is very important to check with your pet retailer for your snake's specific dietary, environmental and heat requirements. The frequency of feedings also differs with each species being kept

Some snakes enjoy being handled and some don't. There is a right way in handling and several wrong ways.

Snakes shed their outer skin layer as they grow. Before each shed, your snake will turn a milky color. Do not handle him before or during a shed. In order to help it shed, provide the snake with a rough rock or branches and fresh soaking water.

The information provided is designed to give you the basic information in knowing what is generally required in keeping a snake as a pet. Being a basic guide, it is not intended to replace your veterinarian or local reptile expert. There are several excellent books available written by renowned authors which provide more in depth information on a particular species of snake.

The substrate should be removed and cleaned when soiled. Periodically, the cage and the props used for climbing or hiding should be removed and

cleaned with a diluted chlorine bleach and water solution at least once every two weeks..

WARNING: Always wash your hands with an anti-bacterial soap after handling your snake to minimize the likelihood that people handling reptiles will contract Reptile-associated Salmonella.

Checklist:

- Housing enclosure
- Lock-on screen cover or other security system to prevent escape
- Substrate materials
- Heat lamp
- Under tank heater
- Hiding place
- Heavy branches
- Water bowl

SNAKE BASICS

It is presumed that most people initially select a snake as a pet because they are unusual. However, snake-keeping as a hobby has several attributes. Snakes do not require frequent attention. They are relatively hardy and are clean, odorless and quiet.

You will also find that this exciting, educational hobby requires a limited amount of special equipment for proper care and handling. But it is very important to understand that the proper care of snakes can never be generalized and certain species require very specialized handling. There are many species readily available to the pet hobby and various species occupy different habitats including fields, marshes, meadows, tropical forests and deserts and it is necessary to replicate the snakes natural environment as close as possible in order to provide optimum care.

In recent years the captive breeding of many preferred species has been perfected and captive reared specimens are available on a seasonal basis however there are still many others that are field collected throughout the world.

Housing

Aquariums, with a lock-on screen covers, are ideal enclosures for your snake. They will retain the heat that cold-blooded animals need, in addition to providing maximum visibility and adequate ventilation. Snakes utilize both vertical and horizontal surfaces and should be provided sufficient space for them to stretch

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out and move freely within its enclosure. An aquarium that is longer and deeper than it is tall is best, unless you are planning to keep an arboreal species such as a rough green snake, a ribbon snake or a tree boa that require height for climbing.

Avoid wire along side walls of an enclosure because snakes may strike at the wire or rub against it and cause damage to its face or skin.

Screen covers absolutely necessary to make sure the screen cover is designed for security. Snakes are escape artists and can climb up glass walls, push open covers and squeeze through the smallest openings. There are other more elaborate custom designed reptile enclosures available with molded sides and tops and sliding glass fronts. In all cases, make sure that the enclosure has adequate locking systems to prevent escape.

Environment

The interior of your snakes home can be as simple or as elaborate as you like as long as it conforms to a few basic needs. No matter the species, a clean and dry environment are perhaps the two most important ingredients in maintaining a healthy snake and the interior should be designed with this in mind. Even water snakes, garters, and other species from high humidity micro-climates must have a dry space within the enclosure.

A simple enclosure can contain nothing more than a newspaper substrate, a heavy water dish sufficient in size for drinking and soaking and a hiding place. On the other hand, if you want to create a striking natural environment you may include either cypress bark, aspen shavings, silica sand, stones & rocks and dry leaves. All of the above depends on the specific species and your willingness to go that extra mile in daily and weekly cleaning.

Branches and other climbing devices should be securely anchored and strong enough to hold the snake.

Other accessories may include cleaned and treated cork bark, driftwood, manzanita or grapevine branches, logs and hollowed cholla branches. Since snakes are secretive, a completely enclosed little hiding place is also important. They enjoy coiling in a hiding place that always seems barely big enough for them to fit into.

Desert species prefer sand while burrowing species like potting soil, leaf or litter.

Lighting is also extremely important for all reptiles.

Temperature

Most snakes require a constant ambient temperature between 75°F and 85°F. It is best, however, to provide a slight temperature variation throughout the enclosure. This can be achieved by the strategic placement of an under aquarium heat pad and an incandescent reptile light fixture with a spot light or ceramic heater. By placing the hiding place in the cooler corner, your snake can change his own micro-climate within its environment as it desires.

Tropical species require slightly higher temperatures ranging up to 95°F in the basking area..

Water

IMPORTANT: Always keep the water clean and fresh. Change it regularly.

A heavy, shallow water dish with fresh water is important for drinking and soaking. If you cannot provide a dish large enough for the snake to completely submerge itself, it would be a good idea to allow for weekly soakings in a special plastic container where he can move about, soak, relax and shed its skin or relieve itself if necessary. Some small or tropical species

enjoy drinking from artificial rainfalls in the form of misting with a spray bottle.

Diet

All snakes are carnivorous and in captivity they are typically feed mice, rats, chicks, fish, eggs, red worms, and crickets. Nightcrawlers and minnows are fed to water snakes and garters. Live crickets, earthworms, insects and caterpillars are fed to green, decay and ringneck snakes. Hognose snakes only eat toads while many desert species only eat lizards. Other snakes, bird eggs and even birds are other common diets of various species. The type of feed and how often you feed will vary depending on the age of the snake and the time of year. Normally, snakes should be fed once every 1 to 2 weeks.

Remember, your snake's jaw can expand which will allow him to consume a rodent that is even larger than the size of his head. Never feed a live rodent to your snake! This is unnecessary and can cause permanent scars or death.

Handling

When removing your snake from its enclosure, you must get control of its head and provide support for the rest of its body. Grasp the snake behind the head near its jaw and support its body with your arm or other hand. For larger snakes, it may take more than one person to safely and properly handle the snake. When placing your snake in its enclosure, place the body in first and maintain control of its head until you are ready to remove your hand from the enclosure. Quickly remove your hand and secure the enclosure.