

# Petware House

## Your Neighborhood Pet Store

### **Red-tailed Boa**

Boa constrictor constrictor

### **CARE SHEET**

Red-tailed boas require a large area and need consistent interaction with humans to remain tame. Red-tailed boas have clean markings on a pale, silvery background.



**Average Size** Hatchlings approximately 12" - 16" +/- . Females average 7'- 9', male's average 5' - 8' adult size. Maximum size is around 12 feet & 50+ pounds, but a specimen over 10' in length is rare. Females are typically distinctly larger than males.

**Life span** 15+ years with proper care.

**Feeding** Feed your boa an appropriately sized rodent weekly. By "appropriately sized" we mean prey items that are no bigger around than the snake at its largest point. Boas, especially as juveniles, are not as forgiving of being fed prey items that are too large and this can quickly lead to chronic regurgitation if not corrected immediately. Boas can eat rats from the time they are young - starting off with rat pups or "crawlers" for younger snakes & moving up in size as the animal grows. Do not handle your snake for at least a day after feeding, as this can also lead to regurgitation. Boas typically have great feeding responses and are generally pretty easy to convert to frozen/thawed or pre-killed rodents (see Snake Feeding care sheet). Never leave a live rodent unattended with ANY snake.

**Housing** Enclosures can be as simple or elaborate as one is capable of caring for. Remember that the more "stuff" you put in a cage, the more "stuff" you have to clean & disinfect on a regular basis. That said, there are many different enclosures that work well for boa constrictors, including, but not limited to: plastic sweater boxes (i.e. Rubbermaid), melamine racks, Freedom Breeder cages, and any of the commercially available plastic-type reptile cages, (i.e. those from Vision Herp & other similar manufacturers). Glass aquariums & tanks are adequate; keep in mind that the screen tops on such enclosures can make it difficult to maintain humidity levels. Also refer to our Snake Caging care sheet for more information. Juvenile boas seem to do well in smaller enclosures that make them feel more secure; a small snake in a big cage can become overwhelmed & stressed. For large boas, a minimum cage length of 6' is necessary. Remember that ALL enclosures must allow for a proper thermal gradient that the snake can utilize, with a hot spot on one end and a cooler spot on the other.

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**Maintenance** Spot-clean your snake's enclosure as necessary. When feces/urates/uneaten prey items are present, remove them as soon as possible. Clean & disinfect the water bowl on a weekly basis. Depending on cage conditions, remove all substrate & cage furniture and completely disinfect using a 5% bleach solution approximately every 30 days. Rinse the enclosure thoroughly and allow to dry before replacing cage furniture & your snake.

**Temps** Provide your boa constrictor with a basking spot of 88-90°F and an ambient (background) temperature of 78-80 °F. The ambient temperature should not fall below 75 °F. It is vitally important to KNOW the temperatures at which you are keeping your snake(s). **DO NOT GUESS!!** A great way to monitor temps is to use a digital indoor/outdoor thermometer with a probe. Stick the thermometer to the inside of the cage on the cool end and place the probe on the warm end, and you'll have both sides covered at once.

There are several ways to go about heating the enclosure: undercage heating pads, ceramic heat emitters, basking bulbs (both regular daytime & red "night" bulbs) are just a few. With heat emitters & bulbs it is necessary to really keep an eye on the humidity within the enclosure, especially if combined with a screen top, as both will dry the air quickly. Use thermostats, rheostats and/or timers to control your heat source. Do not use hot rocks with snakes as they often heat unevenly over too small of a surface area & can cause serious burns.

It is important to note that common boas, while very hardy snakes, are sometimes less tolerant of sub optimal temperatures, especially when subjected to them for extended periods of time. Improper temperatures can lead to regurgitation, respiratory infections, stress on your boa's immune system & consequently, death.

**Humidity** Providing proper humidity for boas is important to help ensure complete sheds and your boa's overall comfort, but as stated previously too much humidity can be as problematic as too little. First off, let's establish "humidity" as the amount of moisture in the air. To provide your snake with a humidity level of 50% - 60%, you have a couple of options.

1. Use cypress mulch or a similar substrate that can be misted & is mold-resistant. Cypress is good for this as it turns a tan color when dry & a rich brown when wet, giving a visual cue as to when it needs to be dampened again.
2. Make a "humidity box" for your snake. This consists of packing a plastic container with damp sphagnum moss (think well-wrung-out wash cloth to gauge moisture), cutting a hole in the top or side & placing it in your python's enclosure so that it can access the box as it pleases.

Keep in mind that if you have a screen top on the enclosure you will probably want to cover it most or all of the way with plastic, a towel or some other means of keeping moisture from escaping. This is also where having proper, reliable ambient temperatures (back to that thermometer!) is important, as warm air holds more moisture than cool air. You want the enclosure to be humid, not WET. A soggy cage can eventually lead to bacterial & fungal infections and even death.

**Lighting** Supplemental lighting is not necessary for this species, but if used should run on a 12/12 cycle, meaning 12 hours on & 12 hours off. Continuous bright, overhead lighting is stressful to snakes, especially a nocturnal serpent such as this one.

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## **Water/Accessories**

### **Water:**

Always make fresh, clean water available to your boa, as they have a tendency to drink copiously. The size of the water dish is up to you. If it is large enough for the python to crawl into and soak, sooner or later your snake will make the most of the opportunity, and most seem to enjoy a nice soak on occasion, although boas do tend to soak less than some other boids. Ensure that the bowl is not too deep for juvenile animals - 1" or so will suffice. Snakes of many species will defecate in their water bowls from time to time, so be prepared for cleaning, disinfecting & a water change when necessary. It is often beneficial to have a spare water bowl for such occasions, so that one may be used while the other is being cleaned.

### **Accessories:**

One cage accessory that will be appreciated & utilized by your boa is a good hide box...maybe even a couple of them. Boas are nocturnal snakes that will make use of a place to hide during the day. Provide one on each end of your boa's enclosure so that it doesn't have to choose between temperature & security. Clay flowerpots, plastic flowerpot trays, and commercially available hide boxes all work quite well.

Additional cage furniture can be included for boas - some seem to enjoy climbing branches, and live, harmless plants can help raise cage humidity. Just remember that the more things you put into an enclosure, the more you have to take out, clean & disinfect on a regular basis.

## **BASIC REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION**

Common boa constrictors reach sexual maturity anywhere from 18 months (males) to 3 years (females) of age. This does not always mean that an 18-month-old male & 3-year-old female will be breedable, just a general age range. Breeding size occurs at lengths of 3'+ (males) and 6'+ (females). A female boa should be well-muscled and "thick" before breeding, without the lanky appearance of a sub adult boa. Breeding season in captivity typically ranges from November to March. Stop all feeding at this time. Animals should be well established and in excellent condition before any breeding is attempted. Breeding may be induced by reducing daytime photoperiod to 8 - 10 hours and dropping nighttime temperatures into the mid 70's. Introduce the female into the male's cage approximately 7-14 days after feeding is stopped. Misting the animals with water may induce breeding activity. Ovulation in female boas is usually pretty obvious: thick mid-body swelling as if the animal has eaten a HUGE meal. Females typically shed 14-20+ days after ovulation. Provide a basking spot of 90 - 92 degrees for gravid females. After ovulation, females can be fed small prey items every 14 days if necessary. Female common boas may give birth to a litter of over 50 neonates after a 120 -150 day gestation

## **NOTES AND COMMENTS**

Boa constrictors are the most popular "larger" pet snake, and it is easy to see why. With their docile nature and beautiful array of pattern & color variations these snakes are truly a joy to keep & interact with. Their manageable size and fairly simple care requirements make it easy for enthusiasts to manage substantial collections of boas, and healthy, captive bred babies are readily available throughout the industry.

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