

Petware House

Your Neighborhood Pet Store

Rat and Corn Snakes

Includes Texas, gray, snow and black varieties



CARE SHEET

Rat and corn snakes both belong to the Elaphe (rat snake) genre of the Colubridae family. They are native to temperate and subtropical areas of North America, Europe and Asia. Easier to care for than most species, they come in a wide variety of colors and patterns making them very popular as pets.

Average Size Hatchlings approximately 8 - 10". Adult size is typically 3 - 5' at maturity.

Life span Up to 15 years with proper care.

Feeding Feed your snake an appropriately sized rodent weekly. By "appropriately sized" we mean prey items that are no bigger around than the snake at its largest point. Corn snakes can eat mice their entire lives - starting off with pinks & fuzzies as a hatchling & moving up in size as the animal grows. Do not handle your snake for at least a day after feeding, as this can lead to regurgitation. Corn snakes have GREAT feeding responses - be aware of this as you are feeding, as sometimes these snakes become overstimulated by the smell of food & may mistakenly bite a keeper in their excitement. Fortunately, due to their voracious appetites, corn snakes 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 smaller enclosures that make them feel more secure; a small snake in a big cage can become overwhelmed & stressed. Fortunately adult corns do not require 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 extremely well for corn snakes, 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 with screen tops also work quite well for corn snakes as they do not require higher humidity. Also refer to our Snake Caging care sheet for more information.

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Juvenile corns seem to do well in exceptionally large or elaborate enclosures. A 36" x 18" x 12" enclosure will more than comfortably house an adult corn snake and still allow space for a nice display vivarium.

No matter what, the enclosure in which you keep your corn snake must be secure. Colubrids are extremely talented escape artists, and these are no exception. Ensure that your snake's cage is escape-proof before you start & save yourself the potential stress and heartache of never finding an adventurous snake on the lam. Also 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.

Maintenance There are quite a few substrates that work especially well for corn snakes, and choosing one is a matter of personal preference for your animal's setup. Newspaper is the cheapest & easiest with regards to cleaning and disinfecting: out with the old, in with the new. Aspen bedding works very well for corn snakes, as it packs down & the snakes seem to enjoy burrowing tunnels through the substrate.

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 corn with a basking spot of 88-90° F and an ambient (background) temperature of 70 - 75° F. The ambient temperature should not fall below 70° 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. 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.

HUMIDITY: Fortunately corn snakes are very low-maintenance regarding humidity requirements. Normal household ambient humidity is fine for this species, however, if incomplete or stuck sheds are observed humidity can be raised slightly by providing a humidity box for the snake. This is as simple as cutting a hole in the top of a tupperware container that is large enough for the snake to fit into comfortably, and packing the container with damp sphagnum moss, giving the snake access to the humidity chamber when it so desires. A humidity box is really only necessary if your snake is experiencing trouble shedding, as an environment that is too damp can quickly cause respiratory problems for corn snakes.

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 if a hiding spot is not made available within the enclosure.

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WATER & ACCESSORIES: Always make fresh, water available to your corn in a clean water dish. This is not a species that soaks regularly, so the size of the water bowl is up to you & does not necessarily need to be large enough for the snake to climb into on a regular basis. Ensure that the bowl is not too deep for juvenile animals - 1" or so will suffice. Snakes of many species may 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.

BASIC REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION

Corn snakes reach sexual maturity anywhere from 18 months to 3 years of age. Breeding season in captivity typically ranges from November to May, starting with a brumation period where the snakes are subjected to temperatures from 45 - 55 F for 60 - 90 days. Stop all feeding at least 2 weeks prior to brumation. Animals should be well established and in excellent condition before any breeding is attempted. After 2 to 3 months, both males and females are slowly warmed back up and fed 2 or 3 meals prior to introduction. Introduce the female into the male's cage. Females typically shed 14-20+ days after ovulation; eggs are usually laid within 30 days of post-ovulation shed. Clutch size for corn snakes ranges from 6 - 12+ eggs, and females may lay more than one clutch per year. At incubation temperatures of 82 - 85F (optimal), these eggs take an average of 65 days to hatch.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

For years, corn snakes have been widely regarded as one of the best "beginner" snakes available in herpetoculture today. They are attractive, low-maintenance colubrids that grow into large, robust captives when properly cared for. These tractable serpents have frequently been the beginning of a growing fascination with snake keeping for many herpers. There are myriad morphs of the corn snake being bred on a yearly basis, eliminating the need for wild-caught specimens. Corn snakes are an excellent choice for the beginning herpetoculturist and can make a very nice display animal.

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