

Pet Care Advice

Caring for your Corn Snake

Corn snakes as pets

Corn snakes are a long-term commitment and require specific husbandry conditions so it is essential to consider carefully before taking one on as a pet.

Corn snakes are popular pets as they are easy to handle and become fairly tame with regular handling. They grow to around 1.5m long and can live for around 20 years.

Corn snakes originate from the USA. In the wild they live in grasslands, farmland and pine forests. They are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk and will hide and sleep during the daytime. They are terrestrial, which means they spend most of their time on the floor of the vivarium, but will climb around the vivarium and explore if given the chance.



Housing

Like all reptiles, corn snakes have very specific husbandry needs. As they are cold blooded they are reliant on their surroundings to control their body temperature. It is essential that their environment is closely monitored and controlled.

Vivarium- enclosed cage with glass doors

Corn snakes are active and do not need a huge vivarium. In fact, young snakes find it stressful to be in a large vivarium and are less likely to eat. It is recommended that the vivarium is half the length of the snakes' total body length. It is important that the lid and doors are tightly fitting, as corn snakes are renowned escape artists!

Snakes should always be provided with places to hide at each end of the vivarium so they can hide at the warm end and the cool end.

Substrate- the material on the floor of the enclosure

There are many options for substrate. Ideally it should be easy to clean or replace. Cage carpet/artificial grass, newspaper or Aspen substrates are suitable.

Heat

Heat should be provided using either a heat mat with thermostat, or a bulb with a dimming stat on the roof of the vivarium surrounded by a bulb guard.

Heat mats are generally preferred as bulbs can cause burns if a guard is not used, and it means a more natural light pattern can be used to mimic daylight.

Heat mats should be controlled by a thermostat, and should cover no more than half of the floor space to allow your snake to thermoregulate.

It's advised to have a small thermometer on each end of the vivarium to check the temperature. One end should be around 30°C and the other around 21°C.

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Feeding

Corn snakes are carnivorous opportunistic feeders. In the wild they eat rodents. In captivity corn snakes tend to be fed solely on rodent. Mice are available to buy frozen and should be thawed and fed at room temperature.

Food items should be no bigger than one and a half times the size of the snake's head.

Hatchlings start on 1 pink mouse every 5-6 days and graduate up to an adult mouse every 7-14 days as they grow. Very large snakes may require 2 adult mice per feed.

Do not feed your snake with live food, even a small mouse may bite or injure your snake.

Wild rodents carry parasites and should be avoided at all times.

Never handle your snake straight after a feed, as it will regurgitate the meal. It is advisable to wait 48 hours after a feed before handling your snake.

Feeding your Corn Snake outside the vivarium is recommended to ensure that no substrate is ingested along with the food. Ingesting large amounts of substrate can lead to an impaction.

Water should be available at all times. A large bowl is recommended so that your snake can bathe as well as drink.

Hygiene

Good hygiene practices are important when keeping reptiles. Keeping the vivarium clean is vital for your snake's health.

It is important to wash your hands thoroughly with antibacterial hand soap after handling your snake, and to supervise children while handling all pets especially reptiles.

