

Snake – Ball Python

Are you considering Ball Python as a companion? Here is some information to get you started.

Python regius, called the Royal Python or Ball Python, are mainly terrestrial snakes native to Central and West Africa. They are considered great first snakes because of their generally docile nature.

Males tend to be smaller than females. Fully grown, their average size ranges from 4 – 6 feet long.



Housing

Be ready for your young python's enclosure to grow with them. Hatchlings can start their lives in a 20-gallon tank and move up sizes as they grow. Adult enclosures should be about 4ftx2ftx2ft or larger. Aquariums of this size are available, but some owners opt for custom enclosures made of PVC or melamine.

Substrates can vary, but the most preferred their natural habitat and can hold moderate to high humidity. Reptisoil, Eco Earth and Plantation soil fit the bill for Ball Python substrates. Décor is also important to consider to provide appropriate areas to explore and hide within their enclosure. Décor should include at least one place to hide, a shallow water dish that is large enough to fit their whole body in, and exciting terrain to allow your snake to climb and explore, which are naturally occurring behaviours.

Light, Heat and Humidity:

Even though Ball Pythons are generally classed as nocturnal animals, they can and do benefit from light and UVB in their environment. This helps them to regulate their day/night cycles and natural body rhythms.

In the past, most people argued that just a heat mat would be sufficient. It is still recommended to have belly heat for them. They also benefit from a basking spot in their enclosure.

Basking spot: 35 – 40 Celsius

Warm hide: 30-32 Celsius

Cool hide: 22-27 Celsius

Night time: 22-26 Celsius

Humidity is of vital importance to your snake. Proper humidity levels can be maintained through a moist substrate, humidified air in the room and should range from 45 -75%.

You should have a thermometer and a hygrometer (to measure humidity) inside the tank.

Cleaning

Spot cleaning whenever you notice fecal matter or shed skin in the enclosure daily or weekly, depending on the age of your snake and a full clean of the enclosure about every 4 months. The water dish should be cleaned and refilled daily.

Diet

Ball pythons are carnivores meaning that they require a whole prey to meet their dietary requirements. The frequency that you feed depends on the age and weight of the snake.

Feeding frequency:

Hatchlings (5 weeks old and younger): every 5 days

Juveniles (under 200 grams): every 7 days

Juveniles (between 200 -350 grams): every 7 – 10 days

Juveniles (350 – 500 grams) every 10 – 14 days

Sub adults (500 – 1500 grams) every 14 – 21 days

Adults (over 1500 grams) every 28 – 56 days

Mice and rats are the most common food available for your snake, but there is a wider variety of feeder items out there if desired. African soft-furred rats, quail and chicks offer a nice change from mice and rats.

Offering frozen-thawed food to your snake is a more preferred method of feeding as opposed to feeding them live. Aside from being inhumane for the prey species, live food may fight back and injure your snake.

Food should be defrosted either in a baggie or container used for snake feeding and nothing else. The water temperature for defrosting should be about 38 Celsius. Offer thawed food as soon as it is ready to prevent rotting or bacterial blooms within the prey item.

In order to prevent inadvertent bites from a hungry snake, it is recommended that you use a tool rather than fingers to offer food. Do not handle your snake if you have touched food, as your hands will smell like prey. Some people use a separate tank to feed their snake, so that the snake doesn't ever associate their main enclosure with receiving food.

Handling

When you bring home a new Ball Python, it is a wise idea to leave it be for at least a week before you start handling it. This allows your new friend to get used to the sounds and smells of their new home without becoming too stressed. After that, they should be allowed out at minimum twice a week. This allows them the opportunity to stretch out and exercise and be curious about their surroundings, as they can be rather nosy creatures.

Never reach into the enclosure with your bare hands. You may be mistaken for food even if it isn't feeding day. Using a light snake hook or similar tool to gently stroke your snake will wake it up and not put it into food mode. You can then slip the hook under them and gently lift them enough to place a hand under

them in preparation to take them from their enclosure. Snakes also don't have hands or feet like we do to help them climb. Instead, they use their powerful muscles to wrap around objects to stabilize themselves. It is absolutely normal behaviour for them to treat you like a tree by wrapping themselves around your arm or your wrist. They don't want to intentionally hurt you; their worst fear is falling.

If children wish to hold the snake, an adult should be present at all times to rescue the snake if need be.

Enrichment

Enrichment can include time out of the enclosure to explore. Some people are now seeing how well some snake species use puzzle toys that are created for dogs and cats, and the results are interesting.

Ball Pythons with other pets

Your Ball Python should never interact with your other pets as it can be dangerous for all involved.

Final Words

Always remember to thoroughly wash your hands when you have finished doing anything with or for your reptile friend.

Some information courtesy of ZooMed Laboratories and Reptifiles.