

Snake – Corn Snake

Are you considering a Corn Snake as a companion? Here is some information to get you started.

Corn Snakes are also known as Red Rat Snakes. They are from the Southeastern United States, parts of Mexico and the Cayman Islands.

These snakes are usually crepuscular – seen at dawn or dusk, but many will be out during the daytime. A long and slender species that range from 3 – 6 ft. Corn Snakes are also considered a great beginner species as they have a docile temperament, despite being very active and curious.



Fun Fact:

Early European settlers encountered this species in their cornfields and corn cribs, concluding that it was eating their corn. The truth is that the snakes were doing those farmers a favour by eating the rodents that would otherwise be feasting on the corn, but the name “corn snake” stuck!

Housing

Be ready for your young Corn Snake’s enclosure to grow with them. Hatchlings can start out 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 are ones that imitate 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 an important thing 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, and exciting terrain to allow your snake to climb and explore, which are naturally occurring behaviours.

Light, Heat and Humidity

Corn Snakes can and do benefit from light and UVB in their environment. This helps them to regulate their day/night cycles and natural body rhythms.

It is also recommended to have under-tank heat for them. They also benefit from a basking spot in their enclosure, which can be heated with a heat lamp or ceramic coil.

Basking spot: 32 Celsius

Cool Side: 23 – 24 Celsius

Night time: 20 Celsius

Humidity is of vital importance to your snake as well. 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 four months. Water should be cleaned and replaced daily.

Diet

Corn Snakes are carnivores meaning that they require whole prey to meet their dietary requirements. The frequency that you feed depends on the age of the snake.

Hatchlings every 7 - 10 days, Juveniles every 7 – 14 days, Adults every 14 – 21 days.

Hatchlings and juveniles tend to be smaller, so don't be discouraged if you are still feeding pinky mice and your snake is six months old. Don't rush them to grow up.

Mice and rats are the most common food available for your snake, but there is a wider variety of feeder items 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.

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 Corn Snake, 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 its 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.

Corn Snakes with other pets

Your Corn Snake should not 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.