

CARE SHEET FOR BALL PYTHON - PYTHON REGIUS

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Ball pythons are one of the most popular snakes kept in captivity worldwide. Keeping them can be very rewarding and on the whole, is not too difficult.

It is critically important to have your enclosure complete and ready for your ball python before bringing it home. This way, your snake can acclimate itself to its new environment as seamlessly as possible without jeopardizing its health.

ENCLOSURE

There are two ways to house your snake. The first, and most popular way is in a terrarium. The second method (used more commonly by breeders) is in a rack system.

The size of your enclosure should not exceed one and a half times the length of your snake and should not be less than two thirds the length of your snake. In a terrarium, I prefer to go a little larger so that the enclosure is not too cluttered.

There are many who believe that there is no maximum size to the enclosure - provided the snake has plenty of hides and ample foliage.

Ball pythons are known to be shy animals and (like other snakes) will seek comfort in a small and dark space.

HEAT

As ball pythons are cold blooded, they rely on external heat that you as the owner will provide for them. The snake itself will modulate its own heat requirements and will therefore need a healthy range of temperatures throughout the enclosure.

The warm side of the enclosure should be between 87 - 90 F and the cool side should be 77 - 80 F. As a beginner, and one that has not kept ball pythons successfully before, it is important to have two thermometers affixed to each end of the cage so you can see the exact temperatures at all times.

If your enclosure is too small, creating a proper heat gradient will not be possible.

HUMIDITY

Ball pythons do not need very special humidity requirements. The average humidity levels in your own home will be between 35% and 45%. A ball python's humidity should not drop below 50% but 55% - 60% is ideal. As a beginner, go to your local pet store or gardening store and pick up a hygrometer to accurately measure the humidity in your snake's enclosure.

An easy way to adjust humidity levels in your enclosure is by increasing/decreasing the size of the water bowl. Conversely, you can increase/decrease the amount of ventilation the enclosure receives. Daily misting is not necessary for a ball python.

SUBSTRATE

Ball pythons are clean animals and choosing a substrate is not difficult. Almost any type of substrate you find in the pet shop will work just fine. The more porous the substrate (like mulch) the more it will retain moisture and bolster the humidity. The most popular bedding is probably Coco Husk. Coco Husk is easy to spot clean and easy to replace entirely.

Remember that cedar is not a suitable bedding as it is toxic to all snakes.

HIDES

Like most snakes, ball pythons seek dark and secure places to spend most of their time and providing the right amount of hides is critical to the snake's sense of security. If the snake does not feel secure, it will stress and give you feeding problems.

Provide a hide on both the warm side and the cool side of the enclosure. If your enclosure is quite large, then providing more hides will be necessary. Some people also like to provide a damp hide - a place the snake can go when it needs more humidity. I personally have never provided a damp hide for ball pythons.

LIGHTING

Ball pythons do not need special lighting requirements and will do just fine with the natural photo cycle of your home.

FRESH WATER

Make sure there is always fresh water in the cage of your ball python. Some people change the water once a week. I prefer to change the water every 3 or 4 days. Obviously, if the water gets dirty beforehand, change it immediately.

A healthy ball python will not typically soak in its water bowl. Therefore, this does not need to be a consideration when choosing a water bowl for your snake.

SHEDDING

You will be able to recognize when your snake begins to shed by three main markers. First, the stomach will begin to turn pink, then the skin of the snake will begin to get significantly duller, and finally, the eyes of the snake will become milky and appear opaque. This last stage is called "being in blue". Eventually the eyes will clear up and within the next 36 hours you can expect your snake to shed.

Depending on the age of your snake, it will shed its skin every 4 - 6 weeks. Ball pythons do not typically have problems shedding as their humidity requirements are not too intensive. Should your ball python shed incompletely, soak the snake for two hours in shallow water. Afterwards, the remaining skin should come off easily.

It is always important to check the snake after it has shed to ensure that there is no skin remaining on the tip of its tail, and that the eye caps have been completely removed.

If you find that your snake is not shedding well, there are several things you can do to assist it. The humidity in the cage can be increased by simply moving the snakes water bowl on top of the heat source. You can also soak the snake for two hours in shallow water after the eyes have cleared (and before the actual shed has begun). If necessary, consider decreasing the ventilation in the enclosure to more successfully trap the humidity.

FEEDING

Ball pythons can feed on mice their entire lives but nutritionally speaking, it is better to convert them over to rats as soon as possible. They should be fed on a weekly basis and require 1 appropriately sized meal per week. This means that the mouse/rat should be the same size as the largest part of the snakes body.

To be on the safe side, it is better to feed your ball python in a dedicated feeding cage. This way when you put your hand inside of the snakes primary enclosure, you will not trigger a feeding response and get bit. Though this is uncommon, it has been known to happen.

As your snake gets older, it will become more important to have it eating frozen thawed food. This is because any rodent older than a fuzzy has developed teeth and can cause serious damage to your snake. NEVER leave a live rodent unattended with your snake.

Ball pythons are also known to be finicky eaters (especially in the winter months) - though less so when they are younger. As long as your snake is not losing weight and remains healthy, there is nothing to worry about and they will eventually resume eating.

For the younger ball pythons who are stubborn eaters, methods such as cup feeding can quickly solve your problem. However, when purchasing a baby ball python, the breeder you bought it from will (typically) ensure the snake is eating well before selling it to you. This is why it is critical to source your snakes from reputable breeders only. If you find that your baby snake is giving you problems, make sure your husbandry requirements are being met to the tee. If the snake begins to lose weight, speak to your vet and seek advice from experienced keepers. There are also a plethora of forums online where people are very keen to help new snake keepers and posting your feeding (or other) problems can often lead to finding a quick solution.

HANDLING

Ball pythons are known to be very docile animals and are very comfortable with being handled. On the rare occasion, you will find a snake that is snappy. Even with these snakes, regular handling should eventually calm them down. It is important NOT to handle your snake for at least 36 hours after it has eaten as this can disrupt the digestion of its food and lead to regurgitation. Aside from dealing with the awful smell and mess, it is bad for the snake and can lead to future eating problems. It is also best not to handle your snake while it is in the process of shedding. The main reason for this is because as their eyes turn blue, the snakes ability to see becomes greatly diminished. As one can expect, when an animal cannot see its surroundings, it will become a lot more defensive and be more likely to strike. As you have kept your snake longer, you will learn when it is appropriate to handle it.

Some people are concerned about how often they can handle their snake. The short answer is that as long as your snake does not become agitated, you can handle it as frequently as you like. Also remember that the less often you handle your snake, the less it will be used to being handled. Therefore, if you are keeping a ball python as a pet, regular handling (once or twice a week) is essential.

CLEANING

Make sure you spot clean the cage at least once a week. Do a thorough cleaning once a month. This entails removing all of the contents of the cage and disinfecting them with an appropriate cleansing solution. The substrate should also be completely changed once a month. If you are using newspaper or Astroturf, change it once a week.