

Ball (Royal) Python Care Sheet

Basic Information and Care Requirements

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Introduction:

The Ball, or Royal, Python is one of the most common pet constrictor snakes. Its appeal is largely due to its generally docile behavior and its relatively small size. When feeling threatened, they will roll up into a ball with their head in the middle. It is this behavior which has given them their common name. Not long ago, most of these snakes were imported from Africa, and sometimes presented problems adapting to captivity. Today, more and more of the animals come from captive breeding. Ball Pythons are now being selectively bred for a variety of color patterns and albinism traits.

Basic Information:

Scientific Name - *Python regius*

Natural Habitat – Terrestrial, open forests and grasslands

Size – average maximum length is ~4 feet

Lifespan – expect 20-30 years for a healthy snake in captivity

Diet – carnivorous, feed weekly, appropriately sized mice, and provide constant access to fresh, clean water.

Housing:

The minimum enclosure size for an adult ball python should be no smaller than a 30 gal. tank (36”L x 12”W). We recommend something in the neighborhood of a 48”L x 18”W x 18”H (55 gal. tank) to provide lots of space for stretching out to full length, and allowing for you to provide branches and climbing structures. **You will need to provide a hide box for the snake to have a “safe” place to retreat to.** Ideally, purchase or design an enclosure with a sliding lid or front panel which will not allow the snake to squeeze out. If you can fit your pinky into it, a snake can get out of it! Make sure any lid is clipped in place securely. For substrates, you can use paper, orchid bark, or cypress mulch. **Never use pine or cedar shavings, they are toxic!** If using bark or mulch, be certain that the snake doesn’t accidentally ingest any while eating, or get any lodged in its mouth



Lighting and Heating:

Your Ball Python will need a source of daytime lighting which can be provided by using a reptile daytime spot light. This will also provide a source of heat and a basking spot. You may also wish to provide a nighttime bulb or ceramic heater to maintain the temperature at night without the bright light which would disturb the snake at night. **Do not use a white light at night!** You should provide an overall enclosure temperature of 80-85°F with a basking spot around 90-95°F. Night time temperatures can drop to ~75-80°F. Snakes do not require UV lighting like most other reptiles. If using light bulbs for heat, be sure that they are placed in such a way that the snake cannot contact any hot surfaces.

Humidity:

Ball Pythons do not require a very humid environment. Generally, providing a water dish large enough for them to soak in is sufficient.

Choosing a snake and acclimatizing it to your home:

When choosing a pet, look for an individual that is active and responsive to handling, and which feels strong and muscular. Animals which show loose folds of skin along the body (dehydration); lumps along the body; signs of external parasites such as ticks or mites (look closely around the mouth, eyes, and cloaca); signs of runny or bloody feces in the tank (internal parasites), any discharge of mucus from the mouth, nose, or eyes may be unhealthy. If possible, find out if the animal is eating well, and what it has been fed.

It is not unusual for a snake to refuse to feed immediately when you change its environment. Provide a good set up, and give it some time to adjust to its new home. Try not to handle it or overly disturb it for about two weeks, then how it responds to contact and an offering of food. A visit to a veterinarian is recommended for a fecal exam to detect internal parasites.

Sources:

de Vosjoli, Phillippe et al., The Ball Python Manual Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1995. www.avbooks.com

Coburn, John, The guide to Owning a Ball Python. Neptune City, NJ: T.F.H. Publications, 1994. www.tfh.com

Kaplan, Melissa, Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection (updated Sept. 18, 2002) Ball Pythons. www.anapsid.org/ball.html, 1996

For a more detailed information, please read our advanced care sheets at www.grare.org/library/care.html