



Corn Snake Care Sheet

Temperament

With the odd exception, Corn Snakes are calm, docile, placid snakes that are hardy and thrive very well in captivity. Due to their temperament Corn Snakes are a recommended first snake to keep as they are relatively easy to care for and they also do not outgrow their welcome in the way that some Boas and Pythons can.

Corn snakes do make a good choice for beginners since they are easy to handle and care for. However, they are also favourites with experienced keepers due to the vast array of beautiful colours and patterns selective breeding has produced.

Corn Snakes make great pets as they are highly unlikely to bite and have pleasant personalities. If threatened their first response is to hide, rather than strike and they will occasionally warn of predators with a little tail rattling. If your Corn Snake rattles its tail this is nothing to worry about, just take steps to ensure that your Corn Snake feels secure and continue with regular handling until they become used to you and know that you are not a threat to them.

Handling

Corn Snakes are quite active snakes and will appreciate time outside the vivarium to exercise. Care should be taken to avoid dropping your Corn Snake whilst handling, so support your Corn Snake at all times. Approximately 10-15 minutes 3-4 times a week is a suitable amount of time for handling your Corn Snake, but this may vary depending on the particular snake. Some Corn Snakes will appreciate more time outside the vivarium, while others may shy away from regular handling.

It is important for hygiene reasons to wash your hands with a good anti-bacterial hand wash before and after you handle your snake. This is especially important if you have multiple specimens, so as not to pass on any infections between your snakes. Anti-bacterial hand sanitisers are widely available and are useful to have close to your vivarium for quick and regular hand cleaning.

Feeding

Corn Snakes feed on mice appropriate to the size of their mouth. A prey item should be approximately the same width as one and a half times the size of the corn snakes head.

Hatchling Corn Snakes start on pinky mice, one 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.



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You may also feed your Corn Snake on chicks and fertilized quail eggs to provide a variation in diet, although these are not recommended as a staple diet as these will not contain all the beneficial nutrients and minerals that rodents have. Larger Corn Snakes will also take other small rodents such as gerbils, hamsters and young rats.

Do not feed your snake with live food, even a small mouse may bite or injure your snake. Shop bought frozen rodents are available from most pet shops or bought over the internet, which can be thawed to room temperature and make an excellent all round food for 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 its 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 prey item. If a Corn Snake ingests large amounts of its substrate then it can lead to your snake becoming impacted and ill.

If your snake is reluctant to feed, which is unlikely in a Corn Snake, then there are a few techniques you can try to encourage your snake to feed. One of these is 'braining' the mouse. Snakes are attracted to the scent of brain matter, so if you cut into the skull of the mouse to expose the brain tissue, then they are more likely to take the food item.

Housing

Corn Snakes are not highly active and do not need huge enclosures. A medium sized vivarium (Even a fish tank with a tight fitting lid) will house your Corn Snake nicely. The vivarium should allow a minimum of 1 square foot of floor space to each foot of snake and be approximately a third of the snake's length in height. Hatchlings should start out in an appropriately sized small vivarium as they can become stressed and stop feeding in an oversized vivarium.

Corn Snakes are excellent escape artists, so care must be taken when planning their housing. Make sure your vivarium or tank has a tight fitting lid, which can be clamped down. Corn snakes are very strong and can push a loose fitting lid from a vivarium.

Corn Snakes are relatively easy to care for, as they defecate rarely, so with regular spot cleaning a full vivarium clean out should only be necessary every 3-5 weeks. When you clean out the housing, disinfect the cage furniture and the inside of the vivarium with a weak disinfectant solution or a reptile safe product. In general, if a disinfectant is safe to use for disinfecting baby bottles, then it is weak enough to use with snakes. Completely dry the contents before replacing in the vivarium with fresh substrate. For hygiene reasons it is advised to use separate towels and cleaning cloths for your snakes.



Temperature and Humidity

Corn Snakes are cold blooded and get heat from their surroundings. In the wild snakes bask in the sun to keep warm or move to a shady spot if they are too hot, this is called thermo-regulation. The ideal temperature for you snake's vivarium is a temperature gradient of 21-30°C (70-86°F).

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 should only cover between a third and a half of the floor space to allow your snake to thermo-regulate. This heat mat should be regulated by a thermostat to ensure that it does not overheat. Since a heat mat should provide sufficient heat to keep your corn snake happy, a basic mat stat, like the Microclimate Ministat 100 or the Habistat Mat Stat, should be appropriate. These thermostats are available from reptile shops and online, are relatively cheap, and will ensure the heat source is regulated at a safe level.

A popular alternative to the heat mat is a normal light bulb on the roof of the vivarium, attached to a dimming stat. It is important to ensure that the heat source is protected from direct contact with your snake by using a guard. Corn snakes do not feel heat in the same way that we do and do not always realise that something they are touching is burning them. A bulb guard will ensure that your Corn Snake will stay a safe distance away from the heat of the bulb so burns will be avoided. The disadvantages of using a bulb as a heat source is that the bulb needs to be turned on constantly to keep the vivarium at the correct temperature. Your corn snake does not require light 24 hours a day and can suffer from stress if the light exposure is too long. It is recommended to keep your corn snake in a natural light pattern that mimics normal daytime, so a heat mat is a better choice between the two heat sources. If you do decide to use a heat mat, then an energy-saving bulb with guard can be added to the vivarium for decorative purposes to help you see your snake.

It is useful when using either method to have a small thermometer on each end of the vivarium to check the temperature. Place the thermometers near the hides on top of the substrate as this is where your Corn snake will spend the majority of its time. One end should be around 30°C and the other around 21°C. Checking temperatures regularly is advised to ensure that your Corn Snake can thermo-regulate by moving around the tank.

Corn Snakes do not require a specific humidity level, but may appreciate a light misting of their vivarium to aid them during the shedding process.

Ensure that you do not allow the humidity to reach too high a level as this may cause your Corn Snake to develop a respiratory infection.



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Breeding and Brumation

Corn Snakes breed so well in captivity that it is unusual to find any wild caught animals for sale. They come in an ever-growing range of colour and pattern mutations, which can lead to a very varied collection of just one species.

Corn snakes should be of a good age and weight before they are allowed to breed to avoid problems like egg binding. We would recommend that the minimum requirements for a female to breed would be at least 3 years of age, 3ft in length and 300 grams in weight.

Brumation

Brumation (cooling your snake down for winter) is advised to greater your chances of successful breeding. A good brumation period is about 8 to 10 weeks for the female Corn Snake. The temperature needs to be dropped gradually to around 7-18°C (45-65°F) and maintained until gradually raising it back up after the recommended brumation period. Your Corn snake should not be fed during this time, but fresh water should always be available.

Mating

In the wild the Corn Snake mating season is usually around March, so this is a good time to introduce your female to the male's vivarium for copulation. They can be left together for a few weeks. If the copulation is successful, the female will become gravid (pregnant).

Laying

Once your Corn Snake has become gravid, they will need to feed more frequently to ensure they gain the vital nutrients needed for egg development. A nest box should be placed in the vivarium when it becomes obvious that the female is searching for a place to lay her eggs. A nest box can be made easily from a plastic tub. Simply cut a hole in the lid of the box that is big enough for your female to fit through and fill the tub with damp vermiculite. Once the eggs have been laid, remove the eggs. Your female will be hungry and exhausted, so continue feeding her more often than you normally would to increase your chances of a successful double clutch.

Incubation

Female Corn Snakes will lay between 10 and 20 eggs, which will need to be incubated for between 55 and 65 days (7 to 9 weeks). Try to keep the eggs at a constant temperature of 26-29°C (79-85°F). Vermiculite is a good substrate to have inside the incubator as it will help keep the humidity levels correct.



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Hatchlings

If incubation is successful the hatchlings should break out of their eggs using an egg tooth. They will remain in the eggs to soak up the yolk for a few days before venturing out of the shell. You should watch them closely at this stage, but not force them to leave the egg before they are ready.

Once they are out of the egg, the hatchlings will all need to be housed separately. Small sandwich box type RUBs (Really Useful Boxes) are good for housing your hatchlings at this stage.

Hatchlings will require their first feed after their first shed, which should occur around a week after they hatch. If the hatchling is reluctant to eat its first pinky, try braining the pinky to encourage them to take it. If you are planning to sell on your hatchlings, it is important to ensure that the hatchlings are readily accepting food and are healthy before selling them.

Sexing

There are many techniques you can use to sex your snake, including comparing tail lengths visually as males tend to have longer tails than females, but the only two accurate ways of determining corn snake sex are Popping and Probing. Popping is usually done on hatchling corns and Probing on older specimens. Both techniques should only be carried out by an experienced snake keeper or herpetologist, as your Corn Snake can be hurt if the procedure is not done properly.

Insurance and Healthy Pets Plan

Pet insurance is available for bearded dragons and means that financial concerns do not add to the worry of having a sick pet. Please ask a member of staff for a leaflet about exotic pet insurance. We also provide a healthy pets plan for exotic animals to help spread the cost of routine treatments over the course of 12 months. The plan includes faecal screening, worming and parasite treatment as necessary, husbandry checks and consultations, annual health checks, microchipping, and other benefits. Please ask a member of staff about the benefits of the healthy pets plan or for a leaflet which details prices and benefits.