



## General care

The most common problem to avoid is crushing injuries to delicate hatchlings, often from unsupervised small children, during rough handling. Typical symptoms are sudden refusal to feed and inactivity, often followed by sudden death.

Frozen feed need to be carefully thawed and warmed to blood heat before offering, to avoid stomach upsets and vomiting. Regurgitation can also be caused by too low environmental temperature and some diseases.

The snake's eyes will become cloudy from time to time. This indicates that it is about to shed its old skin. Higher humidity in its hide is useful at this time to assist the shed.

Respiratory problems are indicated by mouth gaping and/or bubbly mucous from the mouth or nostrils. Mouth gaping or inability to close neatly, due to swelling, can be indicative of mouth infections.

If you are at all worried about the health of your snake you should consult your specialist reptile vet as soon as possible.



## Shopping List

Vivarium	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Water bowl	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Heat mat/heat bulb	<input type="checkbox"/>	Substrate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thermostat	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hide(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thermometer(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Branches	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pet safe disinfectant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Frozen mice or baby rats	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good book that covers corn and/or rat snakes	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

***This leaflet is produced by the Pet Care Trust, the national charity that promotes the benefits of pet ownership and education. For more information, go to [www.petcare.org.uk](http://www.petcare.org.uk), or phone 01234 273933.***



***Remember you must never release your pet into the wild.***

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# CARING FOR YOUR CORN or RAT SNAKE

Corn snakes are a species of rat snake originating from the eastern United States. They are the most popular rat snakes species kept, but other popular species originate from other parts of the US, Europe and Asia. Their habitat varies from open wood lands to rocky hillsides. Adult rat snakes are small to medium size, easy to feed and can withstand a large temperature range.

They are generally good natured and therefore ideal as a first snake or for the experienced hobbyist alike. They come in a vast and increasing array of domesticated colour morphs. All corn snakes available are captive bred.



The length of an adult rat snake vary length from 60cm to 200cm

**Their average life span is 15-21 years.**



## Choosing and buying your snake

Good health is indicated by the snake being alert and inquisitive, indicated by extensive tongue flicking in new situations; it should feel 'strong', and not flaccid, in your hands. Good condition is indicated by a body cross-section that is more rounded than angular.

Look for mites, tiny external parasites that suck blood. Pet stores sell remedies, or more serious infestations may need veterinary prescribed treatments.

The vent should be clean and free of any encrustation, indicative of diarrhoea. The body should be symmetrical, clean, and free of swelling, unless recently fed.



## Housing

A well ventilated, adequately heated escape-proof vivarium is, is the best housing for your corn snake. Although most snakes are frequently inactive, long term accommodation should be of such a size that the diagonal of the cage floor is equal to more than half of the snake's length. There must be no gaps between glass sliding doors sufficient to allow a hatchling to squeeze through.

All reptiles are cold blooded and need an external heat source to maintain their body temperature. Only one end of the vivarium should be heated. This creates a thermal gradient allowing the corn snake to choose its preferred temperature (25 – 30°C). Thermometers can be placed at each end of this thermal gradient to monitor the temperature range available. The maximum temperature of the heat gradient, can be controlled by a thermostat.

Wire mesh guards fitted over exposed hot heat sources will prevent thermal burns.

### Temperature

Gentle heat can be provided by using heat mats and more intense heat by spot lights or heat lamps.

Your pet shop can advise on heating products and their use suitable for your corn snake.

The ideal thermal gradient is 25°C at the cool end and 32°C at the hot end. Night temperatures dropping to 22°C to 25°C should cause no harm.

### Substrate

The floor of the cage should be covered with a dry substrate, such as aspen wood shavings or sani-chips, coconut bark, and cypress mulch. Newspaper

is best avoided, particularly in large cages, as it can be likened to the snake living on a skating rink; spinal injury can result.

### Furnishings

Compact hides are good for the well being of most snakes, including corn snakes; placed at both ends of the thermal gradient provides the snake with more choice. Corn snakes will climb, and a piece of branch can be provided for that purpose.

### Lighting

Rat snakes do not need any special lighting but can appreciate UVB lamps that more closely approximate natural conditions.

### Cleaning and watering

Rat snakes should be provided with a no-tip water bowl which is large enough for the snake to submerge in, especially when shedding its skin. Water bowls should be washed and cleaned regularly. Vivariums should be spot cleaned, as soon as droppings are produced, and disinfected with a pet safe disinfectant occasionally. Soiled substrate should be safely disposed of and replaced with fresh.



## Feeding and Water

Rat snakes are carnivores and feed principally on mice or rats.

Snakes consume their food whole. The food offered should be roughly a maximum of one and a half times the diameter of the snake's midbody.

Young rat snakes can be fed every 2-5 days and adults fed every 7 – 14 days. Adults in breeding mode may fast for many weeks.

Frozen food should be carefully defrosted in a bowl of cold water.

When two or more snakes are kept together, the owner should ensure that one does not swallow another if they try to consume the same item of food; it is best to feed them in separate containers. Handling a snake before, during, or after feeding, or when the odour of its food is on your hands, is likely to result in a painful bite.



## Handling

Rat snakes seldom bite, but do need to become accustomed to gentle handling. The snake should be held loosely and supported at the middle and rear of the body, the handler's movements being slow and deliberate.

Never attempt to handle a snake until it has settled down and is feeding regularly. Reptiles can carry a form of salmonella. Good hygiene and washing your hands after handling your snake should be sufficient to prevent any risk of infection. Kissing your snake is best avoided.