

Corn Snakes

Common name: Cornsnake

Latin name: pantherophis guttatus

Animal description:

A medium sized, non venomous constrictors that prefers to be active around dusk and early evening in habitats ranging from fields to woodlands across the southern and east central United States. Their vernacular name was coined from their habit of frequenting the vicinities of storage structures for corn. Such places are abundant with rodents, their principal's prey. Juvenile corns are typically more nervous than adults. Hatchlings will defend themselves against large unknown objects, like you, this aggression will fade as they mature. Adult corns have a calm demeanor. Corns come in a variety of colors and patterns.

Housing:

Enclosures can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They can be as elaborate or simple as the owner is prepared to care for. With larger, more intricate enclosures means more responsibility and more time involved in cleaning. Regardless as to what type of enclosure you decide to use, be certain that it is capable of maintaining a thermal gradient and that it is escape proof!

Babies:

Neonates, or hatchlings, should not be housed in large enclosures. The security of smaller caging is far more acceptable and less stressful on the reptile. A ten-gallon aquarium or equivalent would suffice well.

Adults:

As the snake grows, larger enclosures can be incorporated. An 18 inch corn snake could be moved into a 20 gallon aquarium and reside there as an adult.

It is much more beneficial to house your snake in a cage that is longer opposed to higher. A 20 long would be an excellent enclosure while a 20 tall would have a much smaller floor space.

Homemade enclosures are also a wonderful way of housing snakes. They give the owner some control over the appearance of the enclosure as well as building custom sizes.

Regardless as to what type of enclosure you use, be certain that it is equipped with a tight fitting lid. Corns are escape artists. They can squeeze through an opening the size of their head. Remember this when constructing your corn's enclosure.

Substrates:

There are various substrates that enthusiasts use to bed their snakes. It is a matter of preference when deciding what substrate most suits you and what you are looking for. The not so elaborate "newspaper" is one of the simplest and cheapest substrates that are used. It is one of the easiest and maintenance free substrates out there. Simply discard the used paper and replace with fresh stuff.

Some have also gone to using repti-carpet as a substrate. When using this type of substrate, it is a good idea to purchase two lengths for the enclosure. When one is soiled and is being cleaned, the other can be used in its place. Since cornsnakes do not require a large amount of humidity, this substrate is acceptable.

Shredded aspen is also a favorite amongst snake owners. It is easily spot cleaned and has a much more attractive appearance.

Alternative substrates have also been used. Some of the more common ones are paper towels, butchers paper, carefresh, etc. Regardless as to what substrate you consider, be sure that you research it well to make sure that no prior owners have had any difficulty with it. (I.E. toxic responses, impactions, etc.)

Heating:

Cornsnakes, like all reptiles, are cold blooded and depend upon the temperatures in the enclosure to thermo-regulate their bodies temperature. It is crucial that you provide the correct heating to your reptile in order for it to properly thermo-regulate.

Corns do well with a basking spot of 87-90 degrees. The basking spot is the warmer end of the enclosure. The cooler end of the enclosure should not fall below 70 degrees and is best if it is maintained around 72-75 degrees.

Hide boxes should be placed at each end of the enclosure. This will allow the snake to choose which temperatures he/she is in need of while stilling feeling secure in its hide. There are a number of ways that an enclosure can be heated. Under tank heaters (uth), ceramic heat emitters (che), and basking bulbs are the most popular sources of heat used in the trade. These items can be monitored with the use of a rheostat. This will allow you to regulate the amount of heat that the source is outputting.

Temperature monitoring:

It is crucial that you monitor your snake's enclosure. This can be done with the use of thermometers. There are many different types to choose from and one for every budget. The use of two thermometers is recommended so that each end of the enclosure can be monitored.

Lighting:

Cornsnakes do not require UV lighting. They do however require a photoperiod like all other reptiles. This means that they should have a light cycle of 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness. Continual light will stress the snake out and could cause further

complications. The best method for placing your snake on a light cycle is with the use of timers. Timers will allow you to set which time the lights turn on as well as which time the lights shut down. This will eliminate the possibility of human error by forgetting to shut off the lighting.

The light cycle can be produced with the use of normal household bulbs or basking bulbs.

Humidity:

Corns do not require high levels of humidity within their enclosures. Humidity should only be increased when it is evident that the snake is preparing to shed. Daily misting during a shed cycle is sufficient or you could create a moist retreat for this purpose.

Moist hide:

A moist hide is designed to aid with shedding and to double as an egg-laying box for gravid females. To create a moist hide, cut a hole in the side of a margarine tub. The hole should be closest to the top of the container but should have at least 1 inch of plastic remaining on the bottom.

Place some sphagnum moss or a similar medium in the container and wet slightly. The substrate should not be so wet that water is evident. It also must not be dry. The best way to get a good consistency is to hold the medium in your hand and add water. Now squeeze out the excess moisture. This will leave a safe medium for you to use.

Feeding:

Cornsnakes have a wonderful feeding response and are not "difficult" like many other snakes. Corn snakes can and will eat prey items that are 1 1/2 to 2 times the thickness of their body. It is easier to follow the rule that when feeding a snake you should feed a prey item that is NO larger than the thickest part of the snake. This will allow the snake to easily digest its prey.

Hatchlings and smaller snakes should start with pinkie mice. As the snake matures, the size of the prey item will need to be increased. If you are uncertain when the prey item should be increased, then begin by feeding two smaller prey items. If the snake is easily eating the two items, then it is probable that the prey item size should be increased. So long as you do not feed prey that is too large, the snake will be fine.

Snakes are opportunistic feeders and will eat much more food than is necessary. Do not over feed your corn. One prey item per week is sufficient. If your snake is continuously searching for more food after it has been fed, be sure that the prey items size does not need to be increased.

Most young snakes will need to be stimulated into feeding with the use of live pinkie mice. As the snakes size progresses, so too will the size of the prey. After 2-3 live feedings, the snake should be switched over to frozen/thawed prey. Cornsnakes generally do not have a problem with this conversion. This will eliminate the possibility of your snake being injured by a scared/nervous rodent as the prey items become bigger.

It is not uncommon for a snake to stay in feeding mode a little while after they have taken prey. Be sure to wash your hands to remove any scent that the mouse may have left. You do not want your snake to accidentally bite you thinking you are offering food.

(Snakes that have just eaten should not be handled for 2 days. This allows the snake the time to digest its prey. Handling a snake after a feeding can result in regurgitation. If this is an often occurrence, the snake could become a "difficult" feeder as well as become ill.)

Water:

Corns do not require large water dishes, as most of them are not prone to "bathing/soaking" like many other species. A dish that the snake can "soak" in is not unacceptable so long as it is shallow. They will require a shallow dish that is equipped with fresh water daily. If your snake "relieves" himself in the water dish, be sure to change it immediately. Corns will drink water on a regular basis. Contaminated water will lead to health problems.

Shedding:

Snakes will shed their skin as they grow. A healthy snake will lose its old skin in a single piece. If your snake sheds and it comes off in multiple pieces and/or patches, then you may need to raise the humidity. Shedding is also a way to monitor your snake's growth. Be certain that all of the old shed is removed. Shed skin that is left on the snake can lead to infections as the new shed begins to prepare itself. Pay close attention to the eye caps of the snake. A snake that is preparing to shed may lose their appetite. This is normal. A snake beginning its shed cycle will become dull in color and the eyes will often have a blue hue to them. Once this is noticed, daily misting is suggested to aid with the shed.

Do not be alarmed if you own an albino and cannot see the transformation during the shed cycle. It can be difficult to see the progressive cycle with albino snakes.

Recommended reading:

Bill & Kathy love. The corn snake manual Advanced Vivarium systems, Inc. 200