

Corn Snake (Colubrid) Care Sheet

Introduction

Corn snakes are beautiful snakes that don't grow too large (5 Ft), have a very docile temperament, and have high variations in coloring and patterning.

Housing

Whatever the type of enclosure you decide on. **MAKE SURE IT IS ESCAPE PROOF.** You will have a very difficult if not impossible task of finding an escaped snake.

Newborn corn snakes can be housed in a shoe box size container for the first few months. As your snake grows keep in mind that there should be at least 1 square foot of floor space for every foot of snake length. This space can be shared by more than one animal.

Glass aquariums

Glass Aquariums with screen lids are acceptable, but provide poor insulation. You will need to provide adequate heating and lighting.
Suggested sizes are:

Hatchlings to yearlings – 10 gallon
Yearlings to 2 years – 40 gallon long
Older – 60 gallon or larger

Customized Cages

Wooden cages and melamine cabinets are also available for purchase. For a competent carpenter, a customized cage can be fun to build and give the flexibility to create a cage that will not only be a beautiful addition to a home's décor, but will provide an ideal home for a snake for years, and allow for ease of maintenance and better insulation. If you choose to build a cage you must consider ventilation, type of heating, and lighting.

Accessories

A place to hide is very important to a Corn snake. Overturned ceramic planting pots are ideal, but the possibilities are endless.

Corn snakes like to climb, so if possible, provide a branch that extends to the top of the cage. Be very cautious if placing a branch from the wild in the cage, you could be exposing your snake to fatal insects such as mites. It is highly recommended that you spend the few dollars to get a branch from your local reptile pet dealer.

Probably the most important aspect of keeping a healthy reptile is the availability of clean water. For a snake, this is critical as water provides needed hydration for drinking and shedding. The water container should be large enough for the snake to completely submerge during the days before shedding, and should be changed regularly to ensure a clean drink. Also, keep in mind that if you are not drinking your tap water neither should your snake. If you do use tap water, drops are available from your pet dealer to remove chlorine and chloramines from the water. Do NOT overmedicate the water.

Heating

There are several choices for appropriate corn snake heating. Whatever choice of heating is used, the cage should be heated to provide a warm and a cool side where the ambient (air) temperature is 80-85° F on the warm side and approximately 75° F on the cool side. Corn snakes, like all reptiles, do not make their own body heat and rely on a behavioral mechanism called thermoregulation to regulate their body temperature. Thermoregulation means that when a reptile is too cool, it moves to an area to warm itself, and when it is too hot, it moves to a cooler area. **Access to warm areas is critically important to the health of your snake.** Appropriate heating is required for proper digestion and the effective functioning of the immune system.

If the tank has a screen top, a shop light or metal reflector may be placed on top of the cage, to one side, with a heating bulb inside to create a basking area of 80-85 degrees F. Another method of heating is the use of quality under tank heating pads. Under tank heaters are plastic with one adhesive side. The adhesive side of the heater is used to attach it to the bottom of the outside of the tank, on one side of the cage. These heaters can only be used with certain types of cages, so check the directions before purchase

The use of electric heat rocks for any reptile is HIGHLY discouraged as they have been know to cause severe injury and even death by burning.

Lighting

Ideally, it would be advantageous for all captive reptiles to be housed in such a way that they could be exposed to and benefit from direct, unfiltered sunlight during the daylight hours every day. This represents the healthiest and most natural situation. Unfortunately, this set of circumstances can rarely be fulfilled by hobbyists because it is neither practical nor possible. The next best solution is to use an artificial ultraviolet light source rather than fluorescent or incandescent light bulbs.

Recommended bulb: Repti Glo 2.0 Daylight Terrarium Lamp 30W (or similar).

It is best to supply 10-12 hours of daylight and 12-14 hours of darkness each day, with a gradual increase in the number of hours of light in the spring and a gradual decrease in the fall and winter months. A timer works well for this as you can move the adjustments by 30 minute increments when necessary.

Substrate

The substrate of a cage is the material that is on the bottom. There are appropriate and not so appropriate choices of substrate in corn snake housing.

Acceptable substrates include reptile bark, Bed-a-Beast, Aspen bedding, AstroTurf, butcher paper, paper towels, newspaper, and AstroTurf. Reptile bark and Bed-a-Beast can be purchased in pet stores, and is attractive and natural-looking. Reptile bark is available in a few different sizes. The smaller size looks more natural with Corn snakes. Bed-a-Beast comes in compressed blocks that must be mixed with water and expanded. Once this is done it does make a desirable substrate. Aspen bedding is acceptable as it is made from hard woods and eliminates the respiratory problems caused by other wood shavings. AstroTurf can be used, but it does tend to rot easily if wetted, so it is best to have several pieces cut to fit the cage so you can rotate dirty and clean pieces. Butcher paper can be acquired in many places such as home depot or art supply stores. Butcher paper and newspaper, while not particularly attractive, allows one to keep the cage very clean by continuously replacing the soiled paper. Paper towels have the same advantages and disadvantages of butcher paper.

The following should **NOT** be used as a substrate:

- Cedar and pine shavings are unacceptable as they cause respiratory problems in snakes.
- Corn cob bedding (manufactured for use with birds) should not be used as a substrate because it causes excessive drying of dermal tissues and can cause serious intestinal blockage if swallowed.

Feeding

Most colubrids will eat rodents. Baby Corns will begin by consuming live "pinky" mice and moving to larger versions of rodents as they grow. Mice are usually available in "Pinky", "Fuzzy", "Hopper" and "Adult". In addition, adult mice are usually available frozen. It is not recommended to feed live adult mice or rats to snakes because they can cause bodily harm and infection. However, some snakes are reluctant to accept thawed prey. Make sure to completely thaw any frozen prey by placing rodent in plastic bag and immersing in warm water until thawed. NEVER use an artificial heating source to thaw frozen prey such as microwave or stove. A good rule of thumb for feeding is to feed each snake every 5 to 7 days a prey item that makes a nice size bulge that disappears in 48 hours.

It is a good idea to start a "Feeding Card" or chart to document when feeding last occurred and what size prey was fed. Each card should include when individual snakes were fed and what they were fed, as well as when they shed, eliminate and if they regurgitate. This is an important tool in establishing the health of your snake.

Health Care:

There are many responsibilities that come with being a new reptile owner. Providing a clean safe environment and proper nutrition are very important to the health of your dragon. Perhaps the most important and most overlooked is regular Veterinary care.

Finding a Good Reptile Vet:

Since Reptile Vets are difficult to find, it is best to seek them out before you actually need one. In many cases, you may need to drive some distance to get to one. There are a several sources online that can give you names of Reptile Vets in your area, the most popular is: Herp Vet Connection <http://www.herpvetconnection.com>

You may also consult your local Yellow Pages. Reptile Vets are often listed with Avian (bird) Vets or Exotic Animal Vets. Your regular Vet may be able to recommend one or you can ask other reptile owners in your area what vet they use.

When to Take Your Reptile to the Vet:

Routine Check Ups: In general, just like your cat or dog, your Reptile needs to be taken into the Vet for a regular check-up on a yearly basis. During this routine check-up, it is standard for the Vet to do a fecal exam to check for parasites.

Non Routine Visits: You should call your Vet regarding any abnormal behavior, such as listless or lethargic behavior, sudden weight loss, sudden not eating, regurgitating, abnormal bowel movements, unusual lumps, swelling or skin blotches, coughing, mucous in the eyes, muscles twitches and anything else that would seem unusual or abnormal.

Emergency Situations: These are situations where you need to pack up your snake and go directly to the vet. Do not call or e-mail anyone for advice because the time you waste could cost your snake its life. Emergency situations include (but are not limited to):

- Broken Bones
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Loss of consciousness
- Uncontrolled regurgitation/diarrhea
- Burns
- Egg bound
- Anything sticking out of your snake that should be inside (i.e. Rectal Prolapse)
- Anything sticking in your snake that should not be.

Conclusion

Corn snakes are justifiably one of the most popular pet snakes of all time. Corn snakes come in many beautiful colors, and are hardy and docile. This care sheet is not all of the information required to care for a corn snake properly, but it is a start. If you own a corn snake or plan on purchasing one, it is YOUR responsibility to thoroughly research the needs of your pet; doing so will make both your lives easier.