

Ball Python Care Sheet

Housing Hatchlings to Adults

Hatchlings should be kept in an enclosure with no more than 40 square inches of floor space. If a hatchling is placed in too large of a container, it may become insecure in its surroundings and refuse to feed.

As the snake matures, you will need to increase the size of its cage. Pre-adult snakes will be happy with 120 to 200 square inches of floor space, while an adult ball python will require at least 400 to 600 square inches. A 20-gallon is usually suitable for most adult snakes, but large snakes will be more comfortable in a 30-gallon tank.

Substrate

Substrate is the flooring you're going to use in the ball python's habitat. This is one area where you have a wide array of options. Newspaper works fine, as does aspen bedding, cypress bark chips, clean gravel, potting soil and even carpet. The primary concern with the substrate is how easy it is to clean and how effective it is at keeping odors to a minimum.

For the most part, the substrate only needs to be replaced about once every second or third month. Routine maintenance consists of simply cleaning out any uneaten food (if you feed your snake in its habitat) or stools. Feeding the snake in a different container is a good way to help keep odors down in its habitat.

Water

Ball pythons require a constant supply of fresh clean water. While it's common for a snake to slither through the water, your snake may be stressed or insecure in its cage if it lays in the water for a period of time. Snakes will also lay in their water if they have an infestation of snake mites, so watch your snake carefully if it starts spending a significant amount of time in its water dish. An eight-ounce water bowl will suffice for a hatchling. As the snake grows, it will need a dish capable of holding at least 16 ounces of water. The snake's water should be changed daily.

Food

One of the benefits of owning a ball python is that it only needs to be fed about once a week; during the winter months the snake may not feed at all. Mice are the snake's staple food, and an adult snake usually won't care whether the mice are live, fresh kill or frozen-and-thawed. Hatchlings, however, prefer live mice about four to six weeks old.

A mature, large ball python may require two or three mice or one small rat per week.

Temperature

Ball pythons do best if they have a habitat that offers two areas of differing temperatures. One side of the cage should be kept between 77 and 80 degrees, and the other side about ten degrees warmer. This allows the snake to reside on the side with the temperature they need at that moment. If you're unable to provide the snake with a dual temperature zone, make the cage an ambient temperature between 78 and 83 and use a heat mat or heat lamp to create a hot spot specifically for basking.

If the snake has recently eaten, the temperature in the cage should not exceed 92 degrees or dip below 75 degrees. A snake with an empty belly will be able to tolerate a wider temperature spectrum. Hatchlings prefer slightly cooler temperatures with a high of about 82 degrees.