Congratulations on your new ball python! Owning a pet is a huge privilege and responsibility, so it’s essential you have all necessary equipment before bringing your new snake home. This detailed ball python care sheet will give you the knowledge you need to raise a healthy and happy snake.

**Supply Checklist**

- Secure tank (10- to 20-gallon for hatchling; 40 gallons or larger for an adult snake)
- Substrate (coconut husk, newspaper, aspen bedding, cypress mulch, or another safe material – Never use cedar, as oils inside this bedding can be toxic)
- Water dish (8 oz. for hatchlings, at least 16 oz. for adult snakes)
- Thermometer
- Hygrometer
- Heat source (overhead or under-the-cage)
- Basking surface
- Hides (at least two)
- Plants (optional but recommended)
- Branch or log for climbing
- Frozen or live mice
- Tongs for feeding

**Lifespan and Life Stages**

The average lifespan of a ball python is around 20 to 30 years, though some can live up to 50 years old. If you acquire a young ball python, it’s important to understand their life stages so you can adjust their care based on their age and size.

- **Hatchling:** Hatchlings are ball pythons under the age of three months. In this life stage they are typically under 11 inches in length and weigh no more than 100 grams.
• **Juvenile**: A juvenile ball python is between 3 months and 1 year old. They are growing rapidly in length and weight during their stage.

• **Young Adult**: Young ball pythons are those between 1 and 3 years old. They are nearly their adult size.

• **Adult**: A ball python is considered an adult after 3 years of age.

**Size**

Ball python hatchlings are typically between 9 and 11 inches in length, and as adults they may grow up to 46 inches long.

• Female snakes are almost always larger than males.
  - Female ball pythons average 3 to 5 feet in length.
  - Males are between 2 and 3 feet long, on average.

• The largest ball python recorded was 78 inches long, so make sure you understand this snake's potential size before you decide to take one home.

**Temperament**

These snakes are generally very docile and gentle, which makes them great pets. They won’t strike unless scared or provoked, although a ball python can become stressed if handled too much. Children can easily handle ball pythons with supervision.

**Enclosure Type**

You will need an appropriate enclosure to house your ball python.

• Either plastic, glass, or wooden paneling will suffice, though most owners prefer plastic because it retains heat more effectively.

• It’s best to choose an aquarium or terrarium with at least one clear side so you can see your snake. However, some hobbyists use opaque plastic tubs in a pinch.

• The lid or enclosure should be ventilated to provide air flow, however, screen tops can make maintaining humidity levels an issue.

• Make sure the tank has a secure lid to prevent your snake from escaping.
Tank Size

The size of your tank will depend on the age of your snake.

- **Hatchling** ball pythons should be kept in a smaller tank. If a hatchling or juvenile python is placed in too large of a container, they may become insecure in their surroundings and refuse to feed.

- As your snake matures, you will need to increase the size of the tank. Ensure the snake has room to stretch out entirely.

  - **Hatchlings** under 300 grams in weight are best housed in a 10-gallon enclosure measuring 20- by 11- by 13-inches.
  - **Juveniles** under 3 feet do best in a 40-gallon enclosure measuring 36- by 18- by 18-inches.
  - **Young and adult snakes** more than 3 feet long may require a 120-gallon enclosure or larger, measuring 48- by 24- by 24-inches.

Substrate

Substrate is the type of material you use to line the bottom of your python's tank.

- The main factors you should consider when picking a substrate are whether your snake can/will eat the material, if it will affect the humidity of the enclosure, risk of harboring parasites, and ease of cleaning.

  - There are several safe options you can choose, like:
    - Newspaper or paper towels
    - Coconut husk
    - Aspen bedding
    - Cypress bark chips

  - **Avoid** using gravel, sand, sawdust, or cedar or pine shavings.

  - Plan to completely change out the substrate and thoroughly clean and disinfect the tank monthly.

Temperature/Humidity

Ball pythons are cold-blooded, so they need heat from their environment to regulate their body temperature and metabolism.

- These snakes do best in habitats that offer two areas of differing temperatures, known as a temperature gradient. One side of the cage should be kept between 77 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit, and the other side about 10 degrees warmer. This allows the snake to self-regulate by moving to the area 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.
• A thermometer is necessary to monitor the temperature of the environment.
• Maintain the humidity in the habitat between 50% and 60%. Use a hygrometer to monitor the humidity level; you may need to mist the enclosure with water daily to achieve this humidity range if you live in a dry environment.

Diet

Mice and rats are the ball python’s staple food. Unfortunately, there is no way to simulate this diet, so you must feed your snake pet real mice or rats.

• These rodents can be fed live, freshly killed, or frozen-and-thawed. Most adults will take any of these forms, although hatchlings tend to prefer live food.
• Choose a rodent based on your snake’s size: The prey should be the size of your snake’s middle at the widest section.
• Live mice and rats can injure snakes, so never leave one in your python’s enclosure without monitoring them.
• Never feed a frozen rodent; always allow them to thaw. Do not defrost in the microwave.
• You will only need to feed your young ball python about once every week. Adults eat every one to two weeks.
• Avoid handling your snake for at least 24 hours following their meal, as this can lead to regurgitation.

Water

Ball pythons require a constant supply of fresh, clean water.

• An 8-ounce water bowl will suffice for a hatchling. However, as the snake grows, it will need a dish capable of holding at least 16 ounces of water.
• Change the water daily.

Accessories

Décor for your snake habitat isn’t just for aesthetics—these accessories also enrich your snake’s life. Your snake will need these accessories:

• Hides: Give your snake at least two places to hide. The main reason behind providing these hiding places is to allow
your snake to move away from the heat source to regulate their temperature and avoid stress. You can use a natural hollow log or a variety of artificial hideaways produced specifically for reptiles.

- **A branch or log:** Ball pythons enjoy climbing, so a branch will give them an opportunity to exercise. Your snake can use the branch as a hide, and it can also assist with shedding.
- **Plant:** Plants aren’t a necessity, but they can enhance your python’s environment by giving them another place to hide. Choose artificial terrarium plants or safe live plants like pothos or aloe.

**Shedding**

Like all snakes, your ball python will shed their skin so they can continue growing.

- Your ball python should shed approximately every three to four weeks as a hatchling, and every four to six weeks as an adult. Shedding takes about 14 days to complete.
- When they’re beginning to shed, you may notice their skin become dull and the eyes become milky or opaque.
- Avoid handling your snake during this time because they are sensitive and may become agitated.
- Humidity levels are important for proper shedding, so you should aim for 65% to 70% humidity during this time.
- You can mist your snake during their shedding, but avoid soaking them. Make sure they have plenty of water in their water dish, as snakes drink a lot of water during shedding.