

Corn Snake Care Sheet

Common Name:

Corn Snake, Red Rat Snake

Latin name:

Elaphe guttata guttata

Native to:

Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern United States (from the Pine Barrens of New Jersey to the upper Keys of Florida).

Size:

Hatchling corn snakes range in size from 9 - 14 inches in length. Adult corn snakes reach anywhere from 2 to five feet. Males tend to achieve a larger size than females.

Life span:

12 - 15 years, the captive record is 21 years.

General appearance:

Corn snakes are a slender snake with black bordered, irregular red or rust colored dorsal blotches. Background color can range from brilliant orange to silvery gray. The belly is white with a black checkerboard pattern. The body scales are smooth to weakly keeled and the sub-caudal scales are divided.

*Note - because of the trend to strive for odd color and pattern morphs in captivity, many strains of captive produced corn snakes vary in appearance from the above described traits. For example, blood red corns lack the checkerboard ventral pattern and striped corns possess dorsal stripes instead of blotches.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure:

From a 12" x 6" plastic "shoe box" or five gallon tank for hatchlings and juveniles to a 16" x 24" "sweater box" or 30 gallon fish tank for adults.

Temperature:

Ambient air temperature should range between 78° - 82°F during the day and may drop to 65° - 70°F at night. Temperatures at the basking area should provide the snake with a constant hot spot of 85° - 90°F.

*Note - Many sub-adult and adult corn snakes will voluntarily cease feeding during the cool winter months. This coincides with their natural winter dormant period. If the snake refuses food for two to three weeks during the winter and appears otherwise healthy, the temperature in the enclosure may be allowed to drop to the mid 60's F for one to three months. If breeding is desired, this dormant period appears to increase fertile egg production.

Heat/Light:

As stated earlier, corn snakes require a supplemental hot spot to adequately digest food and remain active. They should be provided with a heat pad or overhead incandescent light that will provide an area of about 1/3 of the enclosure that achieves a temperature of 85° - 90° F. Hot rocks are unstable and often get far too hot, therefore unless they are connected to a rheostat, which will control the temperature, they are not recommended.

Substrate:

Newspaper, butcher paper, paper towel, indoor/outdoor carpeting, aspen shavings and cypress mulch (for larger individuals). Avoid any cedar based wood shavings, as they exude irritating and possibly toxic vapors.

Environment:

Natural open wood and grasslands. Common around farms where this species helps to control potentially damaging rodent populations. In captivity, corn snakes should be provided with a warm, dry enclosure and should always have clean, fresh water provided in an easily accessible bowl. Animals will become stressed if they are not provided with a shelter where they can conceal themselves from view.

Diet:

Corn snakes of all ages will feed on captive produced laboratory rodents (mice and rats). It is highly recommended that keepers feed their animals only humanely pre-killed food items to eliminate the risk of injury to the snake from the bite of a rat or mouse and prevent unnecessary suffering of the food animal. Never leave live rodents with snakes unattended. If live food is offered and not eaten within 30 minutes, remove it. Never feed captive snakes food procured from the wild. Wild animals possess potentially harmful internal parasites that can build up to debilitating numbers in captivity. Baby corn snakes should be voluntarily feeding on pink or fuzzy mice prior to their sale in a retail outlet. As they grow corn snakes should be fed appropriately larger food items. A good rule of thumb for feeding all captive snakes is that the food item should not be larger than 1 and times the girth of the snake at its thickest point. Adult corn snakes can be adequately maintained on 2 to 3 adult mice or one small rat a week.

Maintenance:

Enclosures should be spot checked for fecal matter daily. It is recommended that carpet substrates be removed and washed at least weekly. Paper substrates should also be changed weekly. If conscientiously spot cleaned, wood based substrates can be replaced every 2 to 3 weeks. Water bowls should be cleaned and replaced at least weekly and any uneaten dead food should be removed after 2 - 3 hours.

Other references or recommended reading:

Keeping and Breeding Corn Snakes by Michael J. McEachern, published by Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1991.

A Color Guide to Corn Snakes by Michael J. McEachern, published by Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1991