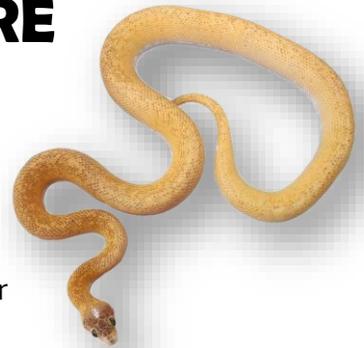


GENERAL PYTHON CARE

Following are a few points to consider prior to purchasing a python.

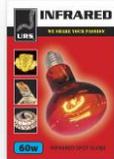
HOUSING:

To keep these animals properly, you must set up a 'micro-habitat'. That is, a small habitat that mirrors the conditions they are normally found in. Most pythons that are commonly kept are from the warmer climates of Australia. Reptiles are ectothermic (that is, they require heat from their environment to regulate their own body temperature). Therefore, you will have to consider creating an enclosure that is heated. This enclosure should not only be heated but regulated at an appropriate temperature according to the species of python you are keeping. Below is information relating to this and also to lighting.



HEATING

Reptiles regulate their body temperature by the environment. They cannot see far into the red spectrum, so an infrared heat globe is perfect for heating the air temperature and for use both day and night.



GRADIANT

It's important the enclosure has a gradient with a clear warm end and cooler end for the animal to move around in to increase or decrease its body temperature. That's the reason for fixing the heat on one side.

THERMOSTAT

Regulates the heat source so that the enclosure does not overheat the reptile. Reptiles more quickly succumb to overheating compared to lack of heat.

UV LIGHTING

Important for the process of absorption of Calcium from the gut, particularly in diurnal species. Different strengths for desert vs temperate species.



MESH GLOBE COVERS

Surround the heat and light sources to reduce the chance of the reptile coming into direct contact and risking burns or electrocution.



ENCLOSURE SIZE

An enclosure should change in size according to the life-stage of the python.



REPTILE HEATING AND LIGHTING:

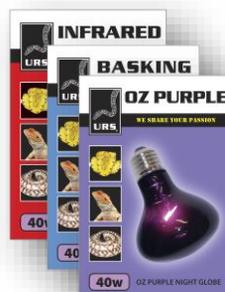
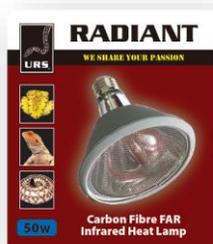
Reptiles need both Heating and Lighting. Reptiles do not make heat for themselves. They maintain necessary body temperatures by taking heat from their environment. The required body temperature varies according to the species, the time of day, the stage of digestion of food among other things. For this reason, the temperatures must vary over the length of the vivarium. In the wild, and in properly constructed outdoor enclosures in appropriate climates, the heat is provided by the sun. All reptiles benefit from lighting that closely resembles the sun, even nocturnal animals will bask in sunlight from time to time.

Ultraviolet Light (UVA & UVB) is essential for diurnal reptile species but will benefit all Reptiles. UVB lighting is required to stimulate the production of vitamin D₃, which is essential for the absorption of calcium through the gut. Its absence will result in illness such as Metabolic Bone Disease and Calcium Rigor (i.e. Ricketts, dragging of the hind legs and spinal deformities). UVA increases appetite, activity and brings out the animals colour. The danger of overheating by the sun through glass means that the only satisfactory method of lighting is to use specifically designed artificial reptile lighting. Outback Max tubes or Compact Max globes are examples of this type of lighting.

Because temperatures vary greatly in most homes and enclosures, it is wise to use a thermostat to properly control temperatures and ensure the safety of the animals. Overheating can be even more dangerous than under heating. There are a range of thermostats available - basic thermostats that need to be wired up by an electrician, and thermostats with a probe and power cord ready to use. For these, simply plug the heat source into thermostat and place the probe in near to the heat source. Thermostats without probes must be placed in the centre of the vivarium, usually on the back inside wall.

Having a thermometer in the enclosure to monitor the performance of the heater and thermostat is a simple yet effective means of checking conditions are right in the enclosure. One suggestion is to affix a thermometer alongside the thermostat, while a second thermometer can be moved around the vivarium to check the thermal gradient.

SAFETY. Both heating and lighting should have protective shielding to prevent burns. Shields should be made of smooth mesh. Plastic diffusers will not allow adequate UV rays to reach the reptile. Pythons are very adept at climbing and getting into small spaces and will coil around anything with heat. Because they are slow to react, there is the danger of the animal receiving burns that can be life-threatening. Using the right mesh cover to fit around heating and lighting is important.



FEEDING: Pythons have a slow metabolism compared to ours. This means they don't need to eat as frequently as we do. Below is a guide to feeding pythons:

- Food should be commercially prepared and frozen to reduce the transmission of parasites.
- Feed more frequently (weekly to fortnightly) when juvenile and reduce as the animal matures (monthly).
- Double the mouth width to gauge food size – pythons dislocate their bottom jaw to open their mouths twice as wide! A common mistake is to feed a prey item that is too small.
- Don't feed when shedding (they may refuse anyway). The skin during this time does not stretch.

Difficult Feeder? Here are some tips:

- Feed at the end of the day. Pythons are nocturnal and more active at this time.
- Leave food in overnight. Some pythons are shy and won't feed unless left alone.
- Check the temperature. This should be appropriate to the species and if it not warm enough, they may refuse to eat.
- Size of enclosure. If this is too large and the animal stresses, they may refuse to eat.
- Other stressors. Moving location and over-handling can stress an animal which just needs some time and space before feeding.
- Try different food types – a python may prefer rats to mice.
- Scenting. Chicken down stuck on a rat or mouse can sometimes stimulate a python's appetite.

HANDLING: Although not venomous, pythons are still capable of biting you. This is why it is sometimes better to purchase a young python to begin with for it to become accustomed to you handling it, making it less likely to bite you. Below are some tips for when handling a python.

Handling Tips:

- Be confident when handling. As with other animals, pythons know when you're fearful.
- Allow the python to move freely through your hands but support their body weight.
- Don't restrain a python when handling them – they hate it and will often respond with defensive biting.
- Don't 'pet' them or touch their head. They don't like this interaction.
- Don't let a large animal wrap around your neck. It is easy to underestimate how strong they can be and if they don't feel secure, their natural instinct is to wrap tightly.
- Don't pull back if they do bite – you can do more damage to yourself and also to the python. If it is a defensive bite, they will immediately let go. If it is a feeding response bite, you are best to ask the help of a second person to assist in removing them.
- Don't handle when coming up for a shed if you can help it or just after feeding. When shedding, they are more sensitive and defensive (as they are unable to see clearly when their eyes are milky). After a feed, they are defensive and may regurgitate their food if handled too much.
- Wash your hands before handling – working with animals you may have the scent of another species on you that they find appealing to eat.
- Wash your hands after handling – like any animal, they have their own set of zoonoses they will share with you if you don't practice good hygiene habits.

HEALTH: Each animal species has its own set of common conditions and pythons are no exception. Here are some of the more common health issues you may experience when keeping pythons.

Intestinal Worms - As with most animals, you should worm your python every 6 months or so. There are special wormers you can buy for this or are available through your vet.

Respiratory Infection: Often occurs during the cooler months, particularly when cooling pythons in anticipation of breeding.

Mouth Rot/Canker: Off-white build up of infected material in the mouth. Can be caused as the result of a mouth injury or can be a secondary condition brought on by a respiratory infection, for example. Should be treated early to avoid spreading and eventual death.

Dysecdysis (Abnormal Shedding): May be the result of low humidity or the reaction to an underlying condition or disease.

Anorexia: Some pythons may refuse to eat to the point of starvation. Often due to an underlying condition or disease.

Salmonella: Most pythons carry this but are asymptomatic unless already under stress from illness and injury. Salmonella is zoonotic (can be passed on to humans) and can cause severe disease so it is important to ensure good hygiene practices when handling and housing these animals.

Snake Mite: These tiny little pests are usually passed on from python to python or from a tree branch that has not been properly treated. This is why resin furniture in your cage that is easily cleaned is a better option. Should your python become infested with mite, you will need to treat the animal and enclosure with a suitable mite treatment such as Mac Mite spray. It is important to carefully follow instructions of any treatments.

Always keep your cages very clean using a reptile-safe cage cleaner and clean cages regularly to reduce the chance of your pet (or yourself) contracting a disease.

Keeping a python can be a unique and rewarding experience and getting your enclosure and micro-habitat right from the start can give you years of enjoyment.