



Ball Python Husbandry Sheet

The ball python, AKA royal python (*Python regius*), is the smallest species of python. Hatchlings are around 10 inches long, adult females range from 3-5 ft, and adult males reach 2-3ft. It is a terrestrial snake native to the lowland rainforests of West Africa. These nocturnal snakes make very popular pets due to their small size and very calm, shy demeanor. The average lifespan of ball pythons is 30 years, but some can live into their 40's!

Housing

A variety of cage types are acceptable to house a ball python, from Rubbermaid containers or commercial plastic reptile cages, to glass aquariums and tanks. Containers with screen lids or lids with holes in them make it difficult to control humidity levels. A 36in x 18in x 12in container should be adequate for one adult python. Your cage should have a couple hide boxes for your python as well, so it has somewhere to feel comfortable and safe. You should have one on the warm side and one on the cold side of the tank.

Like all reptiles, ball pythons are cold blooded. This means they require a temperature gradient throughout the tank to maintain their internal body temperature. The hot (basking) side should be 88-96°F and a cool side at 77-80°F, taking great care not to let it fall below 75°F. To obtain these temperatures you can use a basking bulb, or an under-tank heater. Do not use heating rocks, as they can cause burns on your ball python. They provide a constant source of heat from underneath the ball python, which they are not used to and also have a tendency to short out and have extremely hot areas. The humidity for your python should be within 50-60%. This can be difficult to maintain with a screen top and basking bulb combo, so be sure to monitor this closely. If proper humidity is not maintained, proper skin shedding cannot occur.

While supplemental lighting is not necessarily required for ball pythons, we recommend it with a UVA/UVB bulb or mercury vapor bulb because it will make them happier and more energetic. It should be on a timer of 12 hours on and 12 hours off so as to not disturb their circadian rhythm.

Newspaper and paper towel make an excellent substrate for your python. These options are cheap and make cleaning very easy. It is strongly recommended to not use sand as it can be accidentally ingested and likely would be fatal. Cedar bedding is also not recommended as it contains oils that are toxic to reptiles.

Feeding

Feeding live prey can cause numerous problems for your ball python. It can cause trauma as it makes its way down the digestive tract and will likely attack your ball python if not eaten immediately. Feeding frozen-thawed or fresh killed rodents to your python is a much healthier option. The size of food item can be determined by selecting a rodent no larger than the widest circumference of your ball python. Also, it is important that you do not handle your python for 1-2 days after feeding because this can cause them to regurgitate their meal. To minimize issues with aggression inside the tank, it can be helpful to feed in a separate enclosure. This helps your ball python not associate a hand entering the tank with mealtime.

Ball pythons tend not to eat as much during the winter months or during a shed cycle. This is not a major health concern as long as they are maintaining their body weight. Keep offering food every 10-14 days until they start eating again. During the rest of the year, adult ball pythons can be fed once every 2 weeks, but juveniles will need to be fed weekly in order to grow properly.

Fresh water should be available 24/7. The bowl should be large enough for your python to crawl into. Pythons enjoy soaking from time to time. They will occasionally defecate in their water dish, so be ready to disinfect the bowl and refill with fresh water if this happens.

Cleaning

Your python's cage should be spot cleaned regularly. Remove any paper towels or newspaper that has been soiled by feces or urates as they occur. Every 30 days a deep cleaning will need to be done. The tank and any dishes and hides will need to be disinfected with a commercial reptile cage cleaner or a 5% bleach solution. Make sure to rinse thoroughly and ensure everything is completely dry before returning the snake to the enclosure. The cleaner your tank is, the healthier your snake will be!

Enrichment

Living in captivity can be very stressful for reptiles. This chronic stress and confinement can lead to a suppressed immune system and increased risk of illness. If we can mimic their natural behaviors and habitat, this can lessen those risks dramatically. Below are some options to try with your pet:

- Use paper towel tubes as hides or a maze for your pet to travel through or search for it's food
- Climbing structures made from plywood with dowel pegs sticking out set at a 10 degree angle can give your pet some extra exercise
- Shredded paper inside a large box for your snake to explore
- Scented wood blocks (place in with rodents first) hidden somewhere
 - Ensure the block is large enough that it will not be eaten
- Outdoor time when weather is appropriate
- Provide a rotation of hide boxes, climbing plants/structures and vary cage furniture.

Just make sure to avoid tape, sharp edges, and chemicals. Be careful about disease transfer using anything from outside or another animal. Keep in mind that snakes can and will eat things they are not supposed to – monitor closely.