



Royal Python Care Sheet

Temperament and Handling

Temperament

They have a very docile temperament, as they are more likely to curl up in a ball to protect themselves than strike at a potential threat. They are easy and safe to handle, despite their size, and make a good choice for people who are new to snake keeping.

Handling

Royal Pythons are quite a timid species and some do not appreciate being handled for long periods of time. Regular handling is still important though, to allow your snake to get used to human contact and to exercise outside of the vivarium.

Although Royal Pythons do grow quite large, they are relatively easy to handle. They are slow moving compared to other types of pet snake, but are quite clumsy so should be handled with care. A fall from a height could injure your snake, so take care to support your Royal Python's body during handling.

Shedding

Royal Pythons, like all other snakes, shed their outer layer of skin periodically throughout their lives. Young snakes may shed more frequently than adult snakes, but in general the shedding process occurs several times a year. This is nothing to worry about as a keeper, but there are a few things you can do to help your snake through this process.

Pre-ecdysis is the name given to the changes your snake will go through whilst preparing to shed its skin. This will include a dulling of your snake's skin colour, general inactivity and their eyes will turn a bluish grey colour. At this time your Royal Python may refuse a feed or shy away from being handled, but this depends on the individual snake and how they handle pre-ecdysis. While your snake is 'in blue' it is advisable to handle with care as their vision is obscured by the membrane covering its eyes and they may feel more insecure than usual, therefore more likely to be defensive.

Some snakes will handle a shed without any need for extra help, but if you want to assist your snake during this time you should try to raise the humidity in your vivarium to help your snake loosen its skin. You can do this by placing a larger water bowl in the vivarium so that your snake has the opportunity to soak itself if desired. You can also lightly mist the tank with water to help raise the humidity.



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Another useful tactic is to place a humidity box in the Vivarium. This can be a sandwich box with a hole cut in the top filled with damp sphagnum moss. Your Royal Python should appreciate the extra humidity and it will make the next stage in the process easier for it. Ecdysis is the act of shedding, which is usually started by your snake rubbing its head on rocks or decor to loosen the skin around its head. Once it has worked its head free it will continue to crawl its way out of the old skin by rolling it inside out as it moves. Once your snake has shed its skin it should be removed from the vivarium along with any faeces that usually accompanies Ecdysis. Check your snake to ensure that the shed skin has successfully been removed, taking particular notice that the eye caps and tail end have not been retained. If necessary bathe your snake and remove any patches of skin that have not been shed with a warm towel or tweezers, to avoid infection or death of the tissue below it.

Feeding

Royal Pythons feed on mice or rats appropriate to the size of their mouth.

Hatchlings start on fluffy mice, one every 5-6 days and graduate up to an adult mouse every 7-10 days as they grow. Very large snakes may require 2 adult mice per feed or even the introduction of larger prey items such as rats, guinea pigs and small rabbits. You may also feed a mature Royal Python on day old chicks to provide a variation in diet. Do not feed your snake with live food, even a small mouse may bite or injure your snake. Shop bought frozen rodents are available from most pet shops or bought over the internet; these can be thawed to room temperature and make an excellent all round food for your snake. Wild rodents carry parasites and should be avoided at all times.

Never handle your snake straight after a feed, as it will regurgitate its meal. It is recommended to leave your Royal at least 48 hours after feeding before handling. Snakes that are preparing to shed their skin, rarely feed until after they have shed.

Feeding your Royal Python outside the vivarium is recommended to ensure that no substrate is ingested along with the prey item. If a Royal Python ingests large amounts of its substrate then it can lead to your snake becoming impacted and ill.

If your snake is reluctant to feed, which is likely in a Royal Python, then there are a few techniques you can try to encourage your snake to feed. One of these is 'braining' the mouse. Snakes are attracted to the scent of brain matter, so if you cut into the skull of the mouse to expose the brain tissue, then they are more likely to take the food item.

Since Royal Pythons are notoriously bad eaters, as they will refuse a feed if they are stressed, being over-handled or are not kept in the correct conditions, it is best not to worry if your Royal Python misses the occasional meal. Concentrate on resolving the cause of your Royal's anxiety and they will usually begin feeding again once they become more comfortable.



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Housing

Royal Pythons are not highly active and do not need huge enclosures. A medium sized vivarium (even a fish tank with a tight fitting lid) will house your Royal nicely. The vivarium should allow a minimum of 1 square foot of floor space to each foot of snake and be approximately a third of the snake's length in height. Hatchlings should start out in an appropriately sized small vivarium as they can become stressed and stop feeding in an oversized vivarium.

All Snakes are excellent escape artists, so care must be taken when planning their housing. Make sure your vivarium or tank has a tight fitting lid, which can be clamped down. Royal Pythons are very strong and can push a loose fitting lid from a vivarium.

Royal Pythons may grow up to 5ft in length, but do not necessarily need a large vivarium. They will feel more secure in a suitably sized vivarium, which should be around 3ft(L) x 2ft(W) x 2ft(H) for an adult, dependant on how big your Royal Python grows.

All Royal Pythons need fresh water to drink daily. Water should be given in a reasonable sized bowl which is fairly heavy to stop your snake tipping it over.

Water can also help your snake during shedding; at this time your snake may be found bathing in the water. If the snake defecates in its water bowl, the bowl must be cleaned and disinfected immediately.

Heating and Humidity

Heating

Royal Pythons are cold blooded and get heat from their surroundings. In the wild snakes bask in the sun to keep warm or move to a shady spot if they are too hot, this is called thermo-regulation. The ideal temperature for your snake's vivarium is a temperature gradient of 26-33°C (80-91°F).

Royal Pythons are large bodied snakes, therefore we do not recommend using a heat mat if your snake is in a vivarium setup, this is due to the risk of thermal blocking (where the sheer weight of a large bodied snake causes hot spots on the heat mat due to the heat reflecting back from the vivarium floor and into the snake). Thermal blocking can cause severe burns when heat mats are used inside the vivarium. Heat mats do have their place if used under a RUB (Really useful box) or in a stack system, but MUST be used with a mat stat.

Heat should be therefore be provided using a ceramic heater with pulse thermostat and bulb guard. Ceramic heaters/bulbs give a good ambient air temperature which is preferred by heavy bodied snakes such as Royal Pythons.



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Ceramics should be set up at one end of your vivarium to allow your snake to thermo-regulate. A popular alternative to a ceramic is a normal light bulb or an infra-red on the roof of the vivarium, attached to a dimming stat. It is important to ensure that the heat source is protected from direct contact with your snake by using a guard. Royal Pythons do not feel heat in the same way that we do and do not always realise that something they are touching is burning them. A bulb guard will ensure that your Royal Python will stay a safe distance away from the heat of the bulb so burns will be avoided. The disadvantages of using a bulb as a heat source is that the bulb needs to be turned on constantly to keep the vivarium at the correct temperature. Your Royal Python does not require light 24 hours a day and can suffer from stress if the light exposure is too long. It is recommended to keep your Royal Python in a natural light pattern that mimics normal daytime, so a ceramic heater is a better choice between the heat sources. If you do decide to use a ceramic, then an energy-saving bulb with guard can be added to the vivarium for decorative purposes to help you see your snake.

A ceramic bulb can be purchased from most reptile shops and is a good heat source for Royals as it raises the ambient air temperature of the vivarium. Adult Royals are said to prefer higher air temperatures. Ceramic heaters must be used with both a pulse thermostat and a bulb guard. They can reach high temperatures and you should check the wattage of the ceramic before purchasing, as the wattage of the ceramic is dependent on the size of the vivarium you are trying to heat. Ceramic bulbs last longer than normal light bulbs and do not cause light-stress.

It's useful when using both methods to have a small thermometer on either end of the vivarium to check the temperature. Place the thermometers near the hides on top of the substrate as this is where your Royal Python will spend the majority of its time. One end should be around 33°C and the other around 24°C. Checking temperatures regularly is advised to ensure that your Royal Python can thermo-regulate by moving around the tank

Humidity

Royal Pythons require a humidity level of around 50-60%, so it is advisable to buy a Hydrometer to monitor this. 50% is usually around room humidity so most keepers do not need to worry about humidity levels if the vivarium is set up correctly.

If the humidity in your vivarium is too low, then a damp hide can be added. The easiest way to create a damp hide is to buy some Sphagnum Moss. Soak the moss in water, then squeeze as much liquid out as possible and place it in a hide for your Royal Python to use. Another method for upping the humidity levels is to lightly spray the sides of the vivarium with a misting of water from a spray bottle. Caution must be used when using this method, due to the proximity to the electrical equipment in your vivarium set up.



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If the humidity in your vivarium is too high then extra ventilation is needed. Spare vents can be easily ordered from online suppliers, but care should be taken when fixing the additional vents in place, so that your vivarium does not become damaged. It is important that the humidity level does not remain high as this can lead your Royal Python to develop a respiratory infection.

Veterinary Care

Most of the medical problems experienced by Royal Pythons can be prevented by paying close attention to good husbandry and nutrition but they can still develop just as many health problems as any other pet. Often a python will try to conceal signs of ill health so if you are worried in any way seek prompt veterinary advice. Common problems to look out for include weight loss, diarrhoea, retained skin especially around the head and eyes and loss of appetite or constipation. Your vet is the best person to advise you about your pet's health and will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Rather than wait for a problem to occur why not make an appointment for your python to have a regular check up, just as you would with a dog or cat.

Pet Insurance

Pet insurance is available for Royal Pythons and means that financial concerns do not add to the worry of having a sick pet, Please ask a member of staff for a leaflet about exotic pet insurance.

Healthy Pets Plan

We also provide a healthy pets plan for exotic animals to help spread the cost of routine treatments over the course of 12 months. The plan includes faecal screening, worming and parasite treatment as necessary, husbandry checks and consultations, annual health checks, microchipping, claw clipping and other benefits. Please ask a member of staff about the benefits of the healthy pets plan or for a leaflet which details prices and benefits.