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INTRODUCTION

This care sheet covers all the basics to get you going with one of the most popular snakes in the reptile hobby: Royal pythons, also known as ball pythons!

This species of snake originates from Africa where there is still a wild population that live in the grasslands and shrublands, though most of the ones you see in the UK market are captive bred.

This species come in a wide arrange of colours and patterns known as morphs, and the morphs available in the hobby are ever-evolving.

Like most captive snakes, these guys are non-venomous. They're a medium-sized snake are rarely exceed 3ft-4ft as adults, with females averaging out larger than males.

These animals have an average captive life-span of around 30 years, though some of them have been recorded to live as long as 65 years! It's important to keep them happy and healthy throughout their lives, they're consider one of the most docile snakes in the hobby and known to rarely show aggression, they're tolerant to handling and forgiving to beginner mistakes. The important thing to do before buying a reptile is to do extensive research to make sure the animal fits into your lifestyle and you have the facilities for the long-term commitment

HUMIDITY

Royals should be kept within the humidity ranges of 40-70%, you want to increase the humidity if the animal is about to shed, but be weary of long-term high humidity exposure as it can lead to Respiratory infections or even scale rot.

ROYAL PYTHON

Python regius



HOUSING

The minimum adult enclosure size for royal pythons is:

Length 4ft x Depth 2ft x Height 2ft (48" x 24" x 24") The most popular vivarium of this size is the Vivexotic AAL Vivarium.

This in no way means that you can't go bigger if you have the space, royal pythons can be quite active and would further be enriched by more space.

Royal pythons reach full size in approximately 2-3 years from their hatch, we never recommend starting your royal python hatchling in anything smaller than 2ft, we recommend starting them off in Vivexotic Reptihome Small's. You can put a hatchling snake into their adult size enclosure right away, but you want to make sure to clutter it with plenty of hiding places, foliage, and branches, to make sure the snake feels secure. If Royal pythons, especially hatchlings, feel exposed and unsafe, they can stop eating.

LIGHTING & EQUIPMENT

Royal pythons are crepuscular animals, which means in the wild they would spend most of their waking hours in the dawn/dusk. During this time in the wild they would have lower levels of UV exposure. Like all Reptiles they need a Day/Night cycle of 10-12hrs so all lighting must be turned off at night.

We recommend a T5 39w 6%/Zone 2 UVB strip light for 4'x2'x2' vivarium's, if going bigger the light would also need be upsized depending on the vivarium. These bulbs are popularly available in 2 brands – Arcadia ProT5 kits or Reptile Systems ECO Units. All lighting must have protective heat guards to prevent the snake from hurting itself.

Royal pythons need a 'dark end' of their vivarium which would be the same end as the cool end, to achieve this you want to position the UVB lamp closer to the hot end.

HEATING

Any heat source you use for your snake must be thermostatically controlled to avoid harming your animal. The basking area (spot directly under the heating) must be ranging between 30°-33°celcius, you can control this with an appropriate thermostat. We recommend using Basking bulbs or Ceramic heat emitters to heat your snake from above. Hatchlings can be heated with heat mats but must be moved onto over-heat heating when they reach approximately 2 years old as they can easily burn themselves as they get older due to their body weight.

The best way to measure your temperatures is with an infrared thermometer, which lets you check the temperatures across the tank; however, a standard digital thermometer will do the trick for just measuring the basking spot.

We recommend a 150w Heat lamp in a 4'x2'x2' vivarium controlled by either a microclimate or habitat dimming thermostat, alternatively you can use an Evo or Day/night thermostat to automate all aspects of your heating providing they have a dimming function

In most houses, additional heating at night is not required, however if your house regularly drops below 16°C at night you may need to look into nighttime heating such as CHEs on a separate pulse stat.

DIET & FEEDING ROUTINE

Royals are completely carnivorous animals and can't survive on anything other than a rodent/poultry-based diet, all of their food in this country is frozen-thawed. Royal pythons are notorious eaters, they tend to go on feeding strikes (more often males) – These feeding strikes can be bought on by multiple things, the most common cause is environmental issues. The first thing to do when assessing why your animal isn't eating is to check that all your heating/lighting/humidity is in the correct ranges, if all this is correct, the next thing to do is health check your snake, check for any bumps or scrapes and listen to any whistling that may be coming from the snake, a vet check is recommended if you're concerned about your animal's health. The last and most common reasons for Adult/Sexually mature snakes to stop eating is breeding season, if all else checks out, have a look at the breeding season of royals and see if your snakes starvation period is lining up.

Rats & Mice

The best food for royal pythons is rats, though some small snakes are sometimes started on mice, it's not recommended to stick to mice throughout their lives as they're much too small and don't offer the same proteins as the animal grows.

Gerbils, chicks & other different foods

If you're having problems with your snakes feeding and ruled out any health or environmental issues, you can always try some other foods such as Gerbils, Chicks & Multi-Mammates (Africa soft-fur mice), these foods should only be offered in moderation as their nutritional value and fat content is inappropriate for a staple diet. These prey items can be offered as treats on occasion to enrich your animal's diet.

Schedule & Size Guide

Your snakes prey item shouldn't exceed 1 and ½ times the width of your snakes' widest part. A good indication that your snake may need to be moved up a food size is if you can no longer see the bulge of the food item in your snakes' body after eating.

Snakes under 6 months are usually fed every 5 days, then it goes to weekly feeds after that point. When they mature (3 years old) or reach their suspected maximum size, you want to slow their feedings down to once every 10-14 days. Royal pythons can very easily get over weight if over fed so it is not recommended to feed adult snakes more often than this. If you do have an obese snake it can cause liver problems and other health problems in your animal. If you're trying to slim an obese snake down it must be fed at least once a month. Never put a baby/growing snake onto a diet unless recommended to by an exotic vet.

DÉCOR & SUBSTRATE

Decor

Royal Pythons primarily need décor for health and enrichment purposes. They need to have a raised area below their basking spot to bring them closer to the heat, and branches/landscaping to climb on to help keep them fit and healthy and to prevent any muscle problems. You can also add fake foliage to help create shaded areas.

It's a common misconception that royal pythons don't need height and are fully terrestrial creatures, this has long been disproved but is still spread around the hobby as one of the main pieces of mis-information. Royal pythons will use every inch of the enclosure that you provide for them, and giving them opportunities to climb will enrich their lives and help keep them fit.

Royal pythons are incredibly intelligent animals and will benefit from a shake-up of their décor every few months, never be scared to move their décor around, they'll love exploring their new layout.

Substrate

The best substrate for royal pythons is anything that will hold humidity whilst not staying too wet, we use a mixture of coco fiber and orchid bark chips to given them a good base texture to move against and often mix in a bit of sphagnum moss to help increase humidity levels under certain hides.

We recommend 3-6 inches of substrate to allow your snake to maintain its natural behavior by giving it the opportunity to burrow.