



Ball Python *Python regius*

- Also known as Royal Pythons, Ball pythons earn their name from their habit of coiling into a tight ball with their head in the center when attacked or frightened.
- Ball pythons occur in the savannahs and grasslands of western and central Africa.
- A small, very heavy bodied python; black to dark brown ground color with large, light brown to yellowish brown loaf shaped blotches.
- Hundreds of color and pattern cultivars or morphs of ball pythons are kept and bred in captivity.
- If provided the proper care, ball pythons can attain longevity of 20-25 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 8-12 inches as hatchlings, and 3-5 feet (36-54 inches) for most adults.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling ball pythons can be housed in a 10-15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult ball pythons should be housed in a minimum of a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Ball pythons will thrive on a substrate of newspaper, cage liner material, aspen or Sani Chip shavings, or cypress mulch. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Artificial foliage, driftwood, and other cage furnishings can provide additional security.

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Overhead, incandescent lighting can also be used, but is not required for ball pythons (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for ball pythons range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 86-92 degrees F on the warm side.

Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2-3 months.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, ball pythons will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, and small birds.

Most hatchlings can be started off on hopper mice or fuzzy rats once per week. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult ball pythons can be fed small to medium adult rats once every 5-7 days. A general rule of thumb to follow when feeding snakes is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the widest point of the snake.

Handling

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile ball pythons may initially be nervous and defensive. Ball pythons will initially “ball up”, or less frequently, bite if frightened. Handle your ball python gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most ball pythons will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens