



Gopher snakes *Pituophis catenifer ssp.* and

Pine snakes *Pituophis melanoleucus ssp.*

- Gopher snakes range from southern Canada, throughout the western, central and parts of Midwestern United States, and northern Mexico. Pine snakes have patchy distribution in eastern and southeastern United States.
- Most subspecies are large colubrids with a tan, brown, yellowish, to gray ground color, and brown to reddish brown dorsal and lateral blotches often grading into rings on the tail. Heads are relatively small and wedge shaped for burrowing.
- They are powerful constrictors, and consume many rodents such as mice, rats, and gophers.
- If provided the proper care, gopher/pine snakes can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 12-15 inches as hatchlings, and 4-7 feet (48-84 inches) for most adults depending on subspecies and locality.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling gopher/pine snakes can be housed in a 20-30 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult gopher/pine snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 40-60 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Gopher/pine snakes 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 gopher snakes (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for these snakes range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 84-88 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, gopher, pine, and bull snakes are voracious predators upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds and bird eggs.

Most hatchlings can be started off on pinkie to hopper mice or rats every 3-5 days. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult gopher/pine snakes can be fed adult mice to medium adult rats once every 5-7 days. These species generally present few feeding issues. 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 gopher and pine snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails and hiss, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your gopher/pine snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. There is variability between temperaments of many individual, subspecies, and localities of these snakes. Many will become quite tame and tolerant of regular handling as they become older, while some others will remain irascible and will hiss, strike, or tail rattle at any provocation.

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