



Milk snakes *Lampropeltis triangulum ssp.*

- Milksnakes derive their name from the erroneous belief that they drink milk from cows when they actually inhabit barns and other outbuildings for refuge and for hunting rodents.
- Depending on the species, Milk snakes range over much of the United States, southern Canada, northern Mexico and Central America (including Pueblo and Honduras).
- Milk snakes are variable in color depending on species; many are tricolored with red, black, and white (or yellow) bands that resemble the venomous coral snake. In North America, “if red touches black, its okay jack, if red touches yellow, you’re a dead fellow”. Other subspecies have reddish brown blotches bordered in black on a cream to light brown colored background and a black & white checkered belly.
- If provided the proper care, milk snakes can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 5-10 inches as hatchlings, and 3-5 feet (36-54 inches) for most adults. Some subspecies can reach up to 6 feet (72 inches).

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling milk snakes can be housed in a 10-15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult milk snakes should be housed in a minimum of a 20-30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Milk 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 milk snakes (which are primarily nocturnal). Ideal temperatures for milk 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, milk snakes will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds and bird eggs and occasionally other snakes. Hatchlings and juveniles will occasionally feed on frogs or small lizards.

Most hatchlings can be started off on pinkie mice every 3-5 days. Food items can gradually be increased as needed. Most adult milk snakes can be fed adult mice to small 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 milk snakes may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle your milk snake gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Many milk snakes will become more tolerant and accustomed to handling as they become older, but may still be active and flighty species.

****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****