



Ball Python Care Sheet

Enclosure

When selecting the proper enclosure it is important to remember that Ball Pythons originate from Africa and as such prefer a warm, humid environment. If you select an enclosure that has too much ventilation such as an aquarium with a mesh top it will be very difficult to maintain the proper heat and humidity. The ideal enclosure would be enclosed on all sides with minimal ventilation.

The length of the enclosure should be a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ the length of your ball python and some people believe no larger than 1.5 times the length of their body. It is my opinion that larger enclosures are fine as long as you have a proper hide and foliage.

Ball pythons are also solitary animals and should never be housed together.

Humidity

Ball Pythons need humidity in the range of 60-70% for proper shedding and general health. The most important thing you can do to increase humidity is to ensure that your enclosure doesn't have too much ventilation. Other techniques you can use to increase humidity are to increase water bowl size, choose a substrate that holds moisture better and occasionally mist. Misting is fine in small amounts but don't rely on it to maintain proper humidity.

Heating

Ball pythons are cold blooded and because of this they require heat from their surroundings to maintain their own body temperature. It is important that they have a warm and cool side of their enclosure so that they have the ability to control their own temperature by moving to the appropriate side. Belly heat such as an under the tank heater or heat tape should be used instead of a heat rock or heat lamp as these can injure the snake. It is also important to monitor the temperature with a thermometer or heat gun. Ideal temperatures are 77-82 for the cool side and 87-92 for the warm side.

Substrate

Aspen shavings, newspaper, paper towels and coconut bark are ideal substrates and each have their pros and cons. Never use pine or cedar shavings as these may be toxic to ball pythons and other snakes.

Hides

Ball pythons spend the majority of their time in the wild hidden underground and need a proper hide in their enclosure to feel comfortable and decrease stress. Ball pythons can squeeze themselves into amazingly small hides but the hide should be large enough to fit the snake's entire body.

Lighting

Ball pythons have no lighting requirements and will do fine with 12 hour daylight and 12 hour night cycle. They also do not need a nighttime heat lamp as long as the enclosure is properly heated.

Handling

Ball pythons tolerate handling to different degrees. Some seem to enjoy being held for short periods while others seem to be highly stressed by handling so watch for signs and don't over stress while handling.

Do not handle ball pythons for a few days when moved to a new enclosure and for 2-3 days after feeding.

Water

Clean water that has been treated with a reptile conditioning product should be maintained at all times. Ball pythons do like to occasionally soak in their bowls, so choose a bowl they can at least partially fit inside.

Feeding

Ball pythons feed their entire lives on rodents such as mice and rats. Ball pythons each have their own personalities and feeding preferences. For instance, some will only eat mice while other will eat both. Others will only eat live while others will also eat frozen thawed (F/T). While it is likely you will eventually be able to change to your feeding preference, be prepared for a possible battle of wills between yourself and your snake. It is ideal to feed your ball pythons rats because as they grow into

adults you can continue to get appropriate sized rats. Adult ball pythons would require several mice per week to thrive.

Choose a rodent that is roughly the same thickness as the thickest part of your snake. Hatchling and juvenile snakes can be fed every 4-5 days while adults should be fed once a week.

Some people believe that you should feed a snake in a separate enclosure so that they don't get confused on when it's feeding time and when it's handling time. I believe that this is incorrect and I recommend that you should feed in their enclosure for a few reasons. The main reason is ball pythons can easily tell the difference between you and a rodent and are not going to mistake you for food as long as you don't surprise them or let them smell rodents on you hand or in the room. Many snakes will get more aggressive if they smell rodents and moving them to a feeding enclosure makes it more likely for them to strike. It is also a bad idea to pick them up after they have eaten to put them back in their enclosure because it may cause them to regurgitate, especially if they do not tolerate handling well.

Sub-adult and adult ball pythons go off feed for a variety of reasons. If your snake goes off feed, first double check your husbandry and check the snake for any signs of sickness. If no issues are found give them time and monitor their health and weight. Almost all adult ball pythons go off feed, typically in the winter or in order to maintain a proper weight. Going off feed is more concerning for hatchlings or juveniles. If you are concerned your ball python may be sick or is losing too much weight, take them to a reptile veterinarian for evaluation.

If you choose to feed live mice or rats remember that both have sharp teeth and may bite so don't leave them unattended with your snake for very long. There have been cases where people have left live rodents in the enclosure overnight and the rodent killed the snake. Bites are more likely to occur with adult rodents.

Happy Herping!