

Croydon Reptiles Corn Snake Care Sheet

The Corn Snake (*Elaphe Guttata Guttata*), or Red Rat Snake, is a North American species of rat snake. The name 'corn snake' comes from the fact that it is often found in corn stiles, usually in order to prey upon rodents. Their docile nature, reluctance to bite, moderate adult size (3-5 foot), attractive patterns, and comparatively easy care make them excellent and popular pet snakes. In captivity, they can live up to 16-21 years. Corn Snakes are non-venomous.

Housing

Corn Snakes are not highly active and do not need huge enclosures. A medium sized vivarium will house your Corn Snake nicely. The vivarium should allow a minimum of 1 square foot of floor space to each foot of snake and be approximately a third of the snake's length in height. Hatchlings should start out in appropriately sized plastic boxes / faunariums as they can become stressed in a large environment and stop feeding. Corn Snakes are also excellent escape artists, so care must be taken when planning their housing. Make sure your vivarium has a tight fitting lid. Corn Snakes are very strong and can push a loose fitting lid off with ease. Smaller snakes have also been known to squeeze themselves out between the glasses of sliding door vivariums. This is why it is recommend that Corn Snakes under 1 year old are housed in a faunariums or similar plastic box.

Heating

Corn Snakes are cold blooded and get their heat from their surroundings. In the wild snakes bask in the sun to keep warm or move to shady spot if they are too hot. The ideal temperature for your snake's vivarium is a temperature gradient of 21-30C (70-86F) Heat should be provided using either a heat mat with thermostat or a heat bulb on the roof of the vivarium. Heat mats should only cover between a third and half of the floor space to allow your snake to thermo regulate. A thermostat set to the correct temperature is a MUST otherwise you risk the chances of your snake being burned. If providing heat via a heat bulb make sure you place a cage of the light, otherwise the snake may get to close, or wrap themselves round the bulb, again burning themselves. A dimming thermostat should also be used to control the heat in the enclosure, the most popular being the dimming Habistat.

Failing to provide this could result in the enclosure becoming too hot which can potentially be fatal for your snake.

Hides

All Corn Snakes need somewhere to hide and may become stressed if this is not provided. This could be something as simple as a cardboard box, toilet roll holder etc, which can easily be replaced when soiled. Hides can also be purchased from pet shops and online. Any hide provided should be just large enough for your Corn Snake to curl up in: too small and your corn may not be able to get in, too big and they will not feel secure and can become stressed

Change

Corn Snakes are very inquisitive animals and like to explore new surroundings. Once in a while change the layout of their enclosure, as this will keep your Corn from becoming bored. You will notice once you put your snake back into its enclosure it will start to explore its new surroundings.

Feeding

Corn Snakes feed on Rodents appropriate to the size of their mouth. (Mice, Rats, Chicks and even hamsters and gerbils are available as food items) Hatchlings will start in small mice (pinkies) once a week until eventually an adult will be eating a large mouse or rat every 7-10 days. Very large snakes may even require 2 adult rodents per feed. The general rule is to move the food along in 'threes' when you feel your baby Corn is still hungry after 1 pinkie, offer them 2, when you feel they are still hungry with 2 offer them 3, when they are bigger and 3 does not seem enough put them onto 1 'fuzzy' then 2 and 3 and so on until they are on the big mice and rats. DO NOT feed your snake live food, even if they appear to be off their food. If your snake is not hungry the mouse WILL try to defend itself, possibly injuring your snake, and leaving permanent scars.

Never handle your snake straight after a feed, as it may regurgitate its food –which is not at all pleasant for starters! Snakes that are preparing to shed will rarely feed until after the shed is complete.

Feeding Problems?

If your snake has gone of their food there are a few things you should take into account before rushing off to the vets. Firstly when was the last time they shed? Perhaps they are due another shed soon? Has the snake recently been moved into a new enclosure? The stress of this may put them of their food for a few days. Are the temperatures correct, and have you provided a hide, twigs or any décor? It could be something as simple as putting in a larger hide. Another thing to take into account is the time of year. During winter months snakes will slow down and may not want as much food, and during breeding season their interested in other things than food. Adult males have been known to go 6 months with out food, and as long as they do not lose more than 100grams in weight this is perfectly normal. Of course if your snake is young you may need to try some ways to encourage feeding.

The first thing you should try is to offer slightly smaller rodents, another one is to feed them at a different time of day then you usually do. If they are still refusing to eat try offering warm food (please don't heat it in the microwave – trust me it is a disaster.) Another way to encourage eating is to slit the head open. You can also try 'jacketing' the food item. For example put the skin of a chick over a mouse and visa versa. Finally if all the above fails take them for a car journey – it really does work! Place the snake into a small box and put them in a secure place in the car so as not to be moved around too much. Cover the box with a cloth to keep any light out. The vibration of the car moving will help dislodge anything in the stomach, and will hopefully get their appetite back! If all this fails and you notice your snake looking ill or underweight you must take them to a vet for a check up, as a lot of problems can remain undetected.

Corn snakes shed their skin at regular intervals as they grow (also known as 'sloughing'). As they get older, the time between each shed will decrease. 7-10 days before the skin is shed the old skin will appear grey and dull and the eyes will appear to be glazed or 'milky'. The eyes then clear again and within a couple of days the shed begins. During this period your snake's eyesight will be a lot worse than normal and this may cause him to strike out in a nervous reaction. It is good practice not to handle snakes during the shedding process. The old skin is rubbed against a solid object such as a branch by the snake, and the skin peels off from the nose end. The skin should come off in one piece as the snake wiggles forward. Snakes may also wish to soak themselves in water during this period and you should ensure a water bowl is large enough for the snake's body to be fully submerged. Any dead areas of old skin that allowed to remain can cause problems, if you notice any left

behind, use a cotton wool bud soaked in warm water to try and gently pull the remaining skin off. You should not attempt to pull un-shed skin from the eye caps and should seek professional help if this happens. After shedding is complete you will probably find your snake is very hungry.