

Garter Snake Care Sheet

Caging - Keep babies in a small container initially, large containers tend to be over-whelming for neonates. As they grow, graduate them to a 29 or 50-gallon aquarium or similar sized container. Make sure the lid is tight fit-garter snakes are escape artists!

Substrate - Newspaper works great, as they defecate, replace as needed. Other good substrates are Tekfresh or carefresh. These products are comprised of wood byproducts and are very pliable, allowing them to pass safely if ingested (in small quantities per the product's labeling).

Heat source - Although not mandatory, a heat source will benefit your snake. Use either an under the tank heater or a basking spot with a light guard make sure you use a dimmer switch. Without a dimmer switch, gets VERY hot and can potentially harm the snakes. Place the heat source at one end of the cage. This way the snake will have the option of going to either the warm, heated end or to the cool, room temperature end. Optimum daytime temp is 85 degrees Fahrenheit; night time temps should drop to the mid 70's. A timer works great to automatically turn the tape on and off at desired times.

Water bowl - I prefer small, heavy duty water bowls. These tend to be stable and difficult to tip over. Garters do tend to defecate in their water bowls occasionally so check their water frequently. Place the water bowl at the opposite end of where the heat source lies.

Hide box - To finalize your snake's setup, place a hide box or a piece of newspaper in their cage, 2 if using a heat source. Place one at the cool end of the cage and the other over the heat source.

Miscellaneous - Another good item to keep on hand are small, jagged rocks. These help to facilitate the shedding of their skin.

Diet -Garter snakes tend to have a varied diet in the wild. They will often specialize in a particular item that is indigenous to the area that they are found. They are opportunistic by nature and are known to feed on fish, worms, frogs, toads, salamanders, lizards, snakes (some species are cannibalistic), birds, rodents and carrion. Food items that are generally readily available at pet stores are feeder fish, earthworms and mice (recommend frozen). Baby garters can be started out on feeder fish (rosies or guppies), earthworms or pinky/mice parts. Adults can be fed feeder fish, earthworms or mice (most adult females can feed on small adult mice (12-18 grams), males on large pinkies or fuzzies). Babies may have to be trained to take rodents, which they generally do with minimal effort. What we do is to place the pinky parts in with the feeder fish. If they take the mouse parts, the next meal try the mouse part by itself. If it takes it then, continue feeding the unscented parts until they are large enough to take a whole pinky. If they don't go for the unscented mouse part, try again with the feeder fish and repeat this process until they do switch. If your snake is fed on a fish or worm diet on a long term basis, would highly recommend complementing their diet with a vitamin supplement. If your snakes are fed on an all rodent diet, vitamin supplements are not needed. Baby garters should be fed every 3 to 4 days, sub adults and adults every 7 to 8 days. Feeding adults more frequently all year long can lead to obesity and, ultimately, a shortened life span.

** If you are feeding in a group setting, watch them closely so that they don't grab the same food item and potentially cannibalize their cagemate. After feeding, wash them off thoroughly in water. We house and feed our entire collection individually so to prevent this from happening.

Hibernation - Brumating is not mandatory for babies in their first year of life and would recommend not doing so unless they go off feed in the fall or winter (3 successive meals without eating and they are NOT in shed). If they do go off feed then it is best to put them down into hibernation. 55 degrees is the optimum temperature for hibernating. Fluctuations of plus or minus 5 degrees are acceptable as this emulates natural fluctuations in the wild. When hibernating, place them in complete darkness, provide them with fresh water and check on them periodically. Adults are prepped for hibernation by feeding the collection heavily for the month before they are to be put down. This helps to fatten them up for their long winter sleep. From the last meal that they are fed, wait three to four weeks (two and a half to three weeks for babies) so to allow them

time to clean out their systems of all fecal and urine matter.