

Boa Constrictor Care

Boa constrictor constrictor



The Boa Constrictor is among the larger snake species currently kept as pets. Whilst not as large as the biggest Pythons, much thought should still be given to keeping such a large bodied snake as a pet.

With an average length of 7-9foot (2.1 - 2.7metres) these snakes are still considered manageable, but if you find the look appealing, you may consider some of the smaller locality variations of the Boa Constrictor, such as the Crawl Cay Boa which only reaches lengths of 4-5foot (1.2 - 1.5metres).

Generally though, the Boa Constrictor is considered a friendly species that fares well in captivity under the right conditions.

Housing

When keeping any snake as a pet, you generally want to be able to view the snake from the outside of its enclosure in the most natural surroundings you can offer. A naturalistic setting will be more aesthetically pleasing to your eye and also aid in the general condition of the snake. If the snake likes it's surroundings, it will have a better feeding response and generally grow quicker. A larger terrarium also offers more interest to the snake's life, and by adding branches and other natural products you will enhance the quality of life the snake has, and stop it from becoming lethargic and overweight.

For an adult Boa constrictor, a vivarium 2m Length x 0.9m Width x 1m Height is ample. These large constrictors are one of a few species which are generally not worried about having an enclosure that is "too big" The more room you can provide; the better. Many keepers decide to dedicate a whole room to their beloved snake. Other keepers may decide to use a corner of a room as the back walls and ceiling of the enclosure, and simply build 2 front walls. This will cut down the costs of building and allow for a larger space for the boa. Juveniles should be offered a far smaller

enclosure until you are confident they are comfortable with you, their surroundings and feed regularly.

Snake enclosures can be made from a number of materials. Most commonly used is a melamine coated wood which covers all sides except the front, which has glass sliding doors. Aquariums can also be used for juvenile Boa constrictors, although a specialist lid should be bought or made rather than the original aquarium lid. It is essential when thinking about what type of enclosure you use, you think about these 6 'SSSHHH' factors:

Safety – Can the snake or owner injure itself from the enclosure or any appliances held within?

Secure – Can the snake escape through any small hole or cavity?

Size – Will the enclosure be appropriately sized?

Heating – Is the enclosure able to regulate the temperature properly?

Humidity – Will the enclosure last well in humid conditions? Is there enough ventilation?

Hygienic – Will the enclosure build up a lot of bacteria in small cavities? Is it easy to clean?

By following the steps above, you can have a suitable enclosure made from a variety of materials.

Décor

Décor in your terrarium serves two purposes. First being extra cover for your snake and second, allowing for a more natural and pleasing appearance for yourself. When choosing décor, think about the safety of the snake. Make sure that whatever you decide to use, it is securely fixed and that no rocks, wood or anything heavy can fall and possibly injure, or even kill the snake. You must also make sure that everything used is parasite free. If anything has been picked up from outside, or has originally come from outside, such as cork bark, you should wash it thoroughly with a strong cleaning fluid.

If you decide to go for an extra large enclosure, you must provide plenty of cover and hiding areas. A hiding place can be anything from a large tupperware box with a hole cut out to a naturalistic piece of cork bark. There are many brands of fake plants and décor you can use which is both safe for the animal and pleasing to the eye. Cork bark is available from almost any reptile pet shop in the UK, and can be ordered in if they do not have it in stock. This is excellent cover for any reptile and is 100% natural. One thing you must consider when thinking about the size of the vivarium, is the bigger you go, the more hiding areas you must provide. I recommend at least one hiding place per metre in length of the enclosure for an adult Boa Constrictor.

NOTE: Never use sticky tape in an enclosure; this is an accident waiting to happen. Believe me; removing sticky tape from any snake is no easy task!

Heating

Like all reptiles, Boa constrictors require a thermal gradient, meaning they must be allowed to move around the enclosure to find their required temperature. The hot end of the enclosure should be 88-94°F while the cool end should be approximately 80-84°F. During the night, the temperature should drop to a more constant overall temperature of 80-84°F.

In my opinion, the ideal way of heating a large Boa constrictor's enclosure is to use a large Ceramic Heater. The **WhitePython™ 150W Ultra Slim Ceramic Heater** is the ideal choice as it gives off ample heat but equally doesn't take up too much space in your terrarium. Ceramic heaters do not give off light and therefore in a terrarium you will need a form of lighting as well. To regulate the temperature accurately you should use a suitable thermostat. The **WhitePython™ Pro Control 2 Thermostat** will allow you to regulate the ceramic heater with a separate day time and night time temperature and also allow you to time your light to come on during the day.

Power Plates, spot bulbs and heat mats are also ways of heating a terrarium. These all have their advantages and disadvantages, but in my opinion, none quite weigh out to be as good as ceramic heaters for large enclosures. Heat mats are not recommended at all for large snakes.



Lighting

Boa constrictors are primarily nocturnal, meaning they venture out in the dark of night. This is when their main predators are sleeping, and their prey is awake. This is not to say though, that they never see the sun, or any form of lighting for that matter. They will often bask in the sun during the day in the wild, so lighting should be offered.

Having artificial light in a terrarium is aesthetically pleasing to the owner, and is a good addition to a snake's enclosure. They will use this as a photo-period, and their regular time clock will generally adjust to the settings on which you have your light set to.

They do not require any form of special lighting, such as a D3 Ultra-Violet light commonly used for diurnal species. The **WhitePython™ range of LED lights** are a great way to light your enclosure whilst using minimal electricity. They are also very slim and therefore do not obstruct your view into the terrarium. What's more, they are available in virtually any length you require. If you would like to go a step further and see your snake's activity during the night, you could use the **Moonlight Blue** or **Nighttime Red** versions of the LED lights.

Humidity

Boa constrictors occur over much of Central and Northern South America and are therefore exposed to a high humidity. This should be replicated in captivity to aid to the general health and well-being of your snake. A 60-70% humidity range will allow the snake to slough its skin properly and become less prone to any problems such as respiratory infections. It is not essential to keep this humidity high at all times, but generally giving your terrarium a spray with luke warm water once every couple of days will suffice.

Feeding

New born Boa Constrictors should be offered fuzzy mice or rat pups, and as they grow the mice or rats should become larger. An adult Boa constrictor should be fed on large rats. One or two of these every 2-3 weeks is ample. Hatchlings should be fed on a regular basis, every 7 days is ideal. Their metabolic rate is higher than adults and as they are growing, they need a lot more food to keep them going. The only exception when adult females should be fed more is when they need fattening up for breeding, or just after they have given birth. A female should be fed double the normal amount for several weeks after she has given birth, and for as long as possible after ovulation.

Snakes have the capability of building up a huge fat reserve, and become obese very easily. Taking the weight off however, is a much more difficult task. Obese snakes will not live nearly the length as a healthy snake would due to liver and kidney problems. If you are unsure about your snake's weight, check with a reptile veterinarian.

By Chris Jones
Founder of WhitePython™