

Royal Python (a.k.a Ball Python) Care

Python regius



The Royal Python is fast becoming the reptile hobby's favourite snake. For many years the Corn snake has been the top of the list, but over the past decade there have been dozens of colour and pattern variations appear which has spearheaded the popularity of this small and docile python.

The slow moving and docile temperament of the ball python makes it the ideal starter snake species. There is one down-side, in that they can be quite fussy feeders, but using some good tips for success most hobbyists will overcome these minor issues.

Male Royal pythons usually reach approximately 4ft (1.2m) in length and females often slightly larger at around 5ft (1.5m).

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 Royal Python, a vivarium 90cm Length x 45cm Width x 45cm Height is ample. Contrary to popular belief, you can actually have too large of an enclosure for royal pythons. The reason for this, is that they are very prone to stress, and being in an excessively large enclosure can scare them. Imagine in the wild they are constantly hiding from predators, then, when they feel it's safe in the dark of night, they will venture out to hunt for food. Once they

find their food, they will return to the safety of their secure hiding place until the next time around. They may also leave their den for shedding their skin or finding a mate at certain times of the year. If however, your royal python is behaving normally and feeds regularly; trying a larger enclosure can only be a good thing. Providing the snake does all this, than bigger is better.

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 snakes, 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 'SSSHH' 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 45cm in length of the enclosure for an adult Royal Python.

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, Royal Pythons 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 Royal Pythons enclosure is to use a Ceramic Heater. The **WhitePython™ Ultra Slim Ceramic Heaters** are 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.

Lighting

Royal Pythons 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

Royal Pythons are native to North Africa. The humidity is important for this species, but an overly high, constant humidity will cause problems. A 30-50% humidity should be offered, although perhaps raising it slightly when coming up to a slough will aid in shedding its skin properly. This can be achieved by slightly misting the enclosure every 2-3 days.

Feeding

Hatchling Royal Pythons are capable of feeding on rat pups or small mice. As they grow, so should their food. I recommend using a food item the same size as the girth of the snake. The girth is the diameter of the widest part of the snake, which should be the middle part of the body. Hatchling royal pythons should be fed once a week on one or two appropriately sized food items. As they grow, their food should too increase in size, but not in quantity. As an

adult, their food intake can slow down to once every two weeks, and a larger rat should be offered.

Royal pythons can be incredibly fussy feeders. Many are wild caught or captive farmed, which is often the result of their tricky feeding habits. In my experience, the one trick that works most the time to get them feeding, is to heat up the food item and offer the food using the 'tease' feed method. Please refer to our 'Problematic Snake Feeding Page' for more detailed information on how to get your Royal Python feeding.

By Chris Jones
Founder of WhitePython™

Some Royal Python Colour Morphs



Normal



Pastel



Spider



Bumblebee



Piebald



Clown



Axanthic Pinstripe



Firefly



Killerbee



Super Cinnamon



Yellow Belly



Purple Albino