

# Californian Kingsnake Care

*Lampropeltis getula californiae*



The Californian Kingsnake is the most popular species of the Kingsnake family. They can make excellent pets and are incredibly hardy species. They are not quite as popular as Corn Snakes or Royal Pythons for beginners as they will often “musk” on you if scared, and as hatchlings are much more likely to bite you if intimidated. This is quickly overcome by regular handling and their bites do not hurt, but this can be off-putting for first timers. Similar to Corn Snakes they reach a modest size approximately 4ft (1.2m).

## 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 its 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 Kingsnake Snake, a terrarium 90cm Length x 45cm Width x 45cm Height is ample. Unlike highly timid snakes such as Royal Pythons, Kingsnakes will often fare well in larger enclosures. I would not recommend giving an over-sized terrarium as a hatchling, but as your snake reaches adulthood you could comfortably offer a larger enclosure for your kingsnake providing there is plenty of hiding areas.

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 ‘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 45cm in length of the enclosure for an adult Kingsnake.

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, Kingsnakes 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 86-90°F while the cool end should be approximately 76-80°F. During the night, the temperature should drop to a more constant overall temperature of 74-78°F.

In my opinion, the ideal way of heating a Kingsnakes 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

Kingsnakes 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 a 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

Californian Kingsnakes are generally not exposed to a high humidity range in the wild, and in captivity you should not worry about controlling this. A fairly dry environment should be provided, although raising the humidity when the snake is coming up to a slough may aid in shedding its skin properly.

## Feeding

Hatchlings should be offered pinky mice, and as they grow the mice should become larger. An adult kingsnake should be fed on large size mice or small weaner rats. Hatchlings should be fed on a regular basis, every 4-5 days is ideal. Their metabolic rate is very high and as they are growing, they need a lot more food to keep them going. Adult kingsnakes need feeding once every 2 weeks on 2 large mice. The only exception when they should be fed more is bringing them out of hibernation, getting them into condition for breeding and then, fattening up females for egg production. An egg-laying female should be fed more often than normal, once a week on 2 large mice.

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