

Is this the right pet for me?

Keeping a snake as a pet can be a wonderful experience. The way they move and feel has long held the fascination of people worldwide. With the variety of snake species now available there is bound to be one that suits everyone. In addition they are relatively inexpensive to keep once their enclosure is set up. If housed correctly your snake should bring you many years of enjoyment. Beware though ... keeping and caring for a snake is addictive and often one is not enough!

Recommended for...

- People with limited time.
- Teenagers and adults.
- People with limited space.
- People after something a little different as a pet.

Lifespan

Up to 30 years depending on the species.

Feeding

Snakes are carnivorous and should only be fed thawed frozen or freshly killed prey. Food items include mice, rats, rabbits and day-old chickens. It is illegal and inhumane to feed live prey to snakes. It causes stress to the prey item and can result in serious injury to your snake. Young snakes can be fed weekly while adult snakes can receive food every 2-3 weeks.



NEW SNAKE CHECKLIST

Here's a list of the essentials you'll need for your new Snake. Please ask any of the Best Friends team to help you with your selections.

Essential equipment

- Enclosure with suitable heating and lighting.
- Substrate material for enclosure floor.
- Furnishings such as branches and hides.
- Water bowl.
- Source of food items.

Special Offer:



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Caring for your Snake





Selecting a Snake

There are many different species of snake that can be purchased as pets. Before deciding on what one to select it is important to do your research. Species vary in their size and temperament. Importantly they differ greatly in the environmental conditions they need - some live in the desert while others come from the tropical rainforests of northern Australia. It is vital to know about your snake's species requirements before taking your new pet home.

Licence Requirements

By law all Australian snakes are protected and as such a licence is required to buy and keep them as pets. Information regarding licence types, species allowed to be kept and licence fees can be obtained from the Department of Sustainability and Environment by calling **136 186** or at www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Handling

As hatchlings many snakes can be a little snappy but in most cases this improves greatly with regular, but not excessive handling. Over-handling can cause undue stress and can lead to illness. Always support your snake's entire body and avoid squeezing them. Allow them to gently glide through your hands. Do not handle your

snake in the lead up to it shedding as its vision will be affected and it may be a little snappy. Likewise avoid handling in the days after it has fed as they can regurgitate their food.

We recommend that an adult assist children when handling snakes. It should also be remembered that Australia is home to some of the most venomous snakes in the world. Snakes in the wild should not be approached and only very experienced snake handlers should keep venomous animals.

Housing

Snakes are normally kept in indoor glass-fronted, timber enclosures called terrariums. The size of the enclosure will vary depending on the species and size of the snake. An enclosure 1 metre long x 0.5 metre wide x 1 metre high will be suitable for most snakes. They must be well ventilated and can contain furnishings such as hides, branches and rocks. Fresh water must be provided and the humidity in the cage should be monitored. The floor of the enclosure should be covered with a substrate that is easily cleaned. Newspaper or recycled-paper cat litter are ideal.

Snakes can be kept individually or in pairs but avoid mixing species and beware that fighting may occur.

An extremely important part of housing snakes is providing them with heat. A temperature gradient needs to be created in the enclosure by placing a thermostatically-controlled guarded heat source such as a hot basking light or ceramic heater at one end. Thermometers should be used to monitor this gradient. Each species of snake has its own preferred temperature range. Avoid the use of heat rocks as these can cause serious burns. Our in-store team can advise on what the best temperature range for your particular snake is.

The provision of UV light for up to 12 hours a day will aid in natural behaviours such as feeding and moving around the cage.

Health

It can be difficult to tell if your snake is sick or not. For this reason it is important to keep accurate records of items such as body weight and when your snake has shed, ate and toileted. This allows for patterns to be established because snakes can get sick slowly and often the symptoms are not noticed until too late. The Ourvet team recommend twice yearly checkups.

Common disease problems include respiratory infections, mouth infections, shedding problems and mites.

Reptiles and Salmonella

Most, if not all, reptiles carry the bacteria, Salmonella in their intestinal tract and pass this in their faeces. While it usually does not cause disease in the reptile it can cause serious illness in people. Infection can be easily prevented by ensuring you wash your hands after handling your snake and equipment and using good, common sense hygiene practices.

Responsible pet ownership

In most areas of Australia you are required by law to register your pets. In some cases there are restrictions on the number and types of pets you are allowed to keep. Check with your local government for further information on your rights and responsibilities both to your snake and to your neighbours.

Further Information

An excellent reference book is Keeping and Breeding Australian Pythons edited by Mike Swan. It is available at www.mikeswanherpbooks.com.au.