

CORN SNAKES & RAT SNAKES

SPECIES NAMES

Elaphe guttata (corn or red rat snakes), *Elaphe obsoleta* (black, grey, yellow, and Texas rat snakes).

CAGING/HOUSING

A variety of cages can be used, though glass aquariums with tight fitting mesh screen tops work best. For hatchlings and young snakes, a 10-gallon aquarium is sufficient, though an adult will require at least a 20-gallon aquarium. Corn snakes are known escape artists, so there should be no gaps or cracks in the cage, and the lid must be firmly anchored. Snakes should be housed individually. A water bowl should be provided that is large enough for the snake to soak in. The water needs to be changed frequently. A hide box should also be provided.

Cage substrate: Newspaper (changed frequently), absorbent bedding such as Carefresh, or aspen wood chips (**never use pine, cedar, or cypress chips** as these contain excess aromatic oils which can harm the snake)

LIGHTING/HEATING

A temperature gradient should be created ranging from 70°F at the cool end to 90°F at the warm end. This can be created using a heating lamp with an appropriate reptile heat bulb placed at one end of the aquarium. A thermometer should be placed at each end of the tank to monitor the temperature gradient. **Heat rocks and pads are not recommended** as the snake can burn its skin inadvertently by staying too long on the rock.

UV lighting: UV lighting does not appear to be essential, though it can be beneficial. A seasonal light cycle should be followed, and using an automatic timer can be very helpful, to keep 'sunrise' and 'sunset' consistent.

HUMIDITY

Corn and rat snakes require a moderately high level of humidity. The normal air-conditioned home will be too dry, so moisture can be provided through various methods. A large water bowl placed at the heated end of the aquarium will provide some humidity. A small box containing moistened sphagnum moss can also provide a source of moisture. In instances where snakes are dehydrated or are not shedding in one complete piece, daily misting may be necessary.

FEEDING

All rat and corn snakes are strict carnivores. Most keepers feed live or previously frozen mice to their rat snakes, but some snakes will also accept rats, chicks, frogs, and small lizards. The size of the food item should not exceed one and one half times the girth of the snake at mid-body. If live food is provided, it should be promptly removed from the cage if not eaten within an hour. Live prey can cause serious bite injuries to the snake if left unobserved.

REFERENCE

Love K and Love B. Corn Snakes: The Comprehensive Owner's Guide. From the Herpetological Library of Advanced Vivarium Systems. Irvine CA: Bow Tie Press, 2005. www.avsbooks.com