

BOAS & PYTHONS

BOAS

New world snakes that give birth to live young. Boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor imperator*), Red-tailed boas (*Boa constrictor constrictor*), Short-tailed boas (*Boa constrictor accidentalis*), etc.

PYTHONS

Old world snakes that lay eggs. Ball pythons (*Python regius*), Burmese pythons (*Python molorus*), Reticulated pythons (*Python reticulatus*), Carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota*), etc.

HOUSING

Standard all-glass aquariums make adequate enclosures for boas and pythons. A wire mesh top that securely fastens provides ventilation. Wire cages are generally not recommended as the snake can injure itself trying to escape.

For hatchlings and juveniles less than 2 feet in length, a standard 10-gallon aquarium suffices, but as the snake grows a larger aquarium will be necessary. A 20 or 30-gallon aquarium will work for small pythons (such as ball pythons). Boas and medium-sized pythons (carpet, green tree) will require at least a 55-gallon aquarium (at least 4 feet long). Large pythons (reticulated and Burmese) will require snake specific or custom made enclosures, as these snakes can be over 12 feet long and generally cannot be housed in any standard-sized aquarium.

One of the best substrates to use is newspaper. Newspaper allows for monitoring of feces and can be changed easily. Recycled paper products such as Carefresh can also be used. Cyprus mulch or aspen wood shavings can also be used though they are less recommended. **Never use cedar or pine shavings or cat litter**, as these can cause respiratory problems in snakes.

HEATING/LIGHTING

For most boas and pythons, ambient daytime temperatures of 80° to 85° F are proper with nighttime temperatures of 70° to 75° F. A temperature gradient ranging from about 75°F at the cool end to 90°F at the warm end is essential for the snake to thermoregulate. A heating lamp or ceramic heat emitter placed at one end of the aquarium can create this gradient. Thermometers at each end are necessary to monitor the temperature. A hot spot can also be created at one end of the aquarium by using a heating pad or heat strip underneath the tank, though care must be taken to monitor the temperature. Hot rocks and heat sources placed inside the tank are not recommended as they can cause burns.

UV lighting has not been found to be essential with boas and pythons. A regular photoperiod, however, can be beneficial.

FEEDING

Snakes are fed every 1 to 4 weeks depending on size: larger specimens are fed less frequently than smaller snakes. Smaller snakes will eat mice, rats and chicks; larger snakes eat rabbits and chickens. It is best to pre-kill or stun the prey item before offering it to the snake; live rats and mice often injure snakes. The size of the prey item to be used is dependent on the size of the snake, generally the width of the prey item should be no more than one-and-a-half times the girth of the largest portion of the snake. If frozen prey is used, it must be completely thawed before offering it to the snake.

Water should be provided at all times, and dishes should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

REFERENCE

1. de Vosjoli P et.al. *The Ball Python Manual*. Irving, CA: BowTie Press, Inc, 2003.
2. De Vosjoli P, Klingenberg R, Ronne J. *The Boa Constrictor Manual*. Irving, CA: BowTie Press, 1998.www.avsbbooks.com