

# King and Milk Snakes

*Includes banana, desert, eastern, and Pueblan varieties*



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

King and milk snakes both belong to the Lampropeltis genera. They are native to temperate and subtropical areas of North and Central America. These snakes are easier than others to care for and come in a wide array of colors and patterns, making them very popular as pets.



### Is a king or milk snake the right companion animal for you?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check "Yes" or "No" after reading the following statements:

1. I can accommodate a snake that may grow to six feet.
2. I am comfortable handling a snake.
3. I am comfortable feeding live food to a snake.
4. I can commit to providing proper care for this snake.
5. A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.

If you answered "Yes" to these statements, a king or milk snake may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a king or milk snake and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

**Average Size** 2 to 6 feet long

**Life Span** Up to 15+ years with proper care

**Diet** Thawed, appropriate size, frozen rodents, warmed to room temperature

**Feeding** Feed most adult snakes every two weeks, or as needed; feed juveniles once or twice a week  
Feed in a separate tank so that your snake does not associate your hand or the cage being opened with feeding

**If feeding your snake live rodents, do not leave them unattended. Live rodents can injure the snake, sometimes fatally.**

**Housing** Size – Appropriate size and shape habitat to accommodate normal behaviors and exercise with secure lid

Substrate – Aspen shavings, mulch-type commercial material; unbleached paper towels, soil, dampened sphagnum moss, and bark; pelleted paper

Habitat – Provide a hiding place, such as cork bark or a hide box, and branches for climbing; maintain humidity of 40% to 60%, higher during shedding

Temperature – Temperature gradient (85° F. for the warm end and 70° F. for the cool end); recommend radiant heat; use an incandescent light or ceramic heater as primary heat source, use undertank heat as secondary source

Lighting – Snakes need a photoperiod light cycle; provide 8–12 hours of light daily; do not leave white light on at all times; to view snakes at night, use a black or infrared light

Water – Provide a large dish of fresh water for drinking and bathing

**Must be kept singly. Do not house with other snakes or reptiles.**

**Recommended Supplies**

*Depends on species*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Habitat with secure lid         | <input type="checkbox"/> Substrate                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thermometer                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Hide box or driftwood                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Misting bottle                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Water dish                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humidity gauge                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Undertank heat source                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about king and milk snakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Incandescent light or ceramic heater |

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### Normal Behavior and Interaction

As snake gets ready to shed, eyes will turn a milky blue over the course of a few days and body color will start to dull and develop a whitish sheen

Appetite may diminish during winter months

### Habitat Maintenance

Change water daily

Thoroughly clean the tank at least once week: set snake aside in a secure habitat; scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3% bleach solution; rinse thoroughly with water, removing all smell of bleach; dry the tank and furnishings; and add clean substrate

### Grooming and Hygiene

King and milk snakes will regularly shed their skin; ensure humidity of habitat is at appropriate level to allow snake to shed properly

To facilitate shedding, provide a large container that allows snake to immerse its entire body

Always wash your hands before and after touching your snake or habitat contents to help prevent *Salmonella* and other infectious diseases

### Signs of a Healthy Animal

- Clear eyes (except when shedding)
- Clear nose and mouth
- Body is rounded and full
- Active and alert
- Eats regularly
- Healthy skin

### Common Health Issues

Health Issue (alpha)	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Dermatitis	Blisters. Rapid shedding caused by an unclean habitat or one that is too cold or damp.	Clean the cage and lower humidity. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Nose Rub	Red or swollen nose caused by incessant rubbing on the walls or top of habitat in an attempt to escape.	Changes to habitat must be made. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Respiratory Disease	Labored breathing. Mucus in mouth or nostrils. Can be caused by a habitat that is too cold or damp.	Keep snake warm and dry. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Ticks and Mites	Parasites on skin, can cause disease.	Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.

### Red Flags

- Wrinkled or rubbed skin
- Discharge in nose or mouth
- Abnormal feces or urine
- Vomiting
- Lethargy
- Decreased appetite

**If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.**

### Sources

*A Petkeeper's Guide to Reptiles & Amphibians* by David Alderton  
*Keeping and Breeding Snakes* by Chris Mattison  
*The Proper Care of Snakes* by Armin Geus

**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.