

Rat Snake

Elaphe spp



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Rat snakes are some of the most common in North America. Docile and easy to handle, they are considered an ideal first pet snake. Rat snake species include the black rat, yellow rat, Baird's snake, California rat, rosy rat, fox snake, and others, including the ever-popular red rat snake, also known as the corn snake.



Is a rat 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 up 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 rat snake may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a rat snake and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

Average Size 4 to 8 feet, depending on species

Life Span 15+ years with proper care

Diet Thawed, appropriately sized frozen mice, 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; members of the same species may be housed together, but must be separated during 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

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

Habitat – Provide a hiding area just large enough for your snake to fit inside and a branch or shelf to climb; maintain humidity of 40 to 60%

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 a primary heat source; use under tank 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 water bowl of chlorine-free water large enough for the snake to soak in

Recommended Supplies

- | | |
|--|---|
| <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 rat snakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Incandescent basking 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, remove shed skin and feces 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

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

To facilitate shedding, bathe snake in 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.
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.
Stomatitis	White, cheesy substance in the mouth; loss of teeth and appetite.	If untreated, can be fatal. Consult your exotic animal veterinarian.
Ticks and Mites	Parasites on skin, can transmit 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

Corn and Red Rat Snakes by Jerry Walls

Corn Snakes and Other Rat Snakes by R.D. Bartlett and P. Bartlett

Keeping and Breeding Snakes by Chris Mattison

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.