

# Rat and Corn Snakes

*Includes Texas, gray, snow, and black varieties*



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Rat and corn snakes both belong to the Elaphe (rat snake) genera of the Colubridae family. They are native to temperate and subtropical areas of North America, Europe, and Asia. Easier to care for than most species, they come in a wide array of colors and patterns making them very popular as pets.



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

**Average Size** 1 to 6 feet long

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

**Diet** Thawed, appropriate sized 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; 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 – Mulch-type commercial material; unbleached paper towels, soil, dampened sphagnum moss, and bark; aspen and pine shavings, pelleted paper  
Habitat – Provide a hiding area just large enough for snake to fit inside and a branch or shelf to climb; maintain humidity of 40 to 80%  
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 water bowl of de-chlorinated water large enough for the snake to soak in  
Do not house different species of reptiles together

**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 heater                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about corn and rat 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 a 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 and corn 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 in which snake can 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.