

Ball Python Care Guide



The following information is intended as a basic care guide for pet Ball Pythons. All snakes are individuals and may require different care or feeding depending on individual temperament or circumstances. Please consult a breeder and an exotic vet that specializes in reptiles if you are experiencing any difficulties with your animal(s).

About Ball Pythons

Ball Pythons (*Python regius*) are one of the most commonly kept pet snakes. They are usually calm and they don't get very large, making them a great choice for a pet.

ORIGINS: Ball Pythons are a *terrestrial* species of python found in regions of western and central Africa. In the wild, they are most often found in semi-arid grasslands, forests, and near agricultural areas. They prefer to live in burrows, termite mounds, and low vegetation, most often hunting on or near the ground. They are crepuscular in nature, which means that these snakes are most active around dawn and dusk, as well as at night. As ambush hunters, they actively track down and then wait for prey to run past before striking. They are opportunistic hunters, so fallen or injured small birds and even lizards are fair game in the wild. Young snakes or smaller slender males may even climb up to low bird nests to grab an easy meal during hatching season. (No, this does not make them semi-arboreal.)

SIZE: Ball Pythons are sexually dimorphic. That means there is a noticeable difference between males and females. In this case, only as adults. Adult females are noticeably thicker in body mass and reach sizes of 3.5 to 4.5' regularly, though females can reach sizes of up to 5-5.5'. Males are slenderer and tend to top out between 3 to 4' in length.

LIFESPAN: Ball Pythons reach sexual maturity at 18 months to 2 years for males and 2.5 to 4 years old for females. Typically, they will reach adult size at 5-8 years old. Most pet snakes will live longer than you might think. Ball pythons can live from 15 to 30 years in captivity.

BEHAVIOR: Ball Pythons are medium-sized, shy snakes. They get their name from their tendency to ball up when scared. They are curious explorers when comfortable with their surroundings, though they are known to pick a favorite spot and sit for hours. This spot could be a favorite hide, under the heat source, in their water, or around their owner's neck. Being crepuscular, they sleep most of the day and will venture out to explore in the evenings or at night.

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FEEDING

Ball Pythons can eat any small mammal or even small birds. The best diet for your pet snake is one that is predominately rats. Mice, African Soft Furred rats, and other rodents can be given for variety. **Always feed your snake INSIDE their home enclosure.** A separate feeding tank is NOT recommended.

Young ball pythons need to be fed a meal that is 10-15% of their body weight. They should also be fed relatively frequently, every 5-10 days. Adult ball pythons should be fed less often and a meal that keeps them at a healthy weight. Big females over 1500 grams should get medium rats (100-200 grams). Males are usually fine on small rats or small/medium sizes (50-100 grams). You're trying to maintain their size, not gain at this point. Most adults will maintain their weight being fed every 2 weeks, or even every 3 weeks. If you prefer to feed more often, offer smaller prey to avoid obesity. Below is a basic recommended feeding chart for pet Ball Pythons. Adjust as needed for individual animal's needs.

SNAKE WEIGHT (grams)	PREY WEIGHT (grams)	PREY SIZE/NAME	FREQUENCY
80 – 174	12 – 20	Rat Fuzzy or Small Mouse	5 – 7 Days
175 – 299	22 – 34	Rat Pup or Md – Lg Mouse	Weekly
300 – 499	35 – 44	Weaned Rat or XL/Jumbo Mouse	Weekly
500 – 799	55 – 79	Small Rat or 2-3 Lg/XL Mice	Weekly
800 – 999	80 – 99	Small + Rat	7 – 10 Days
1,000+ MALE	80 – 120	Small + or Small Medium	14 – 21 Days
1,000 – 1,999 FEMALE	100 – 149	Medium Rat	10 – 14 Days
2,000+ FEMALE	150 – 200	Medium + Rat	14 – 21 Days

HOUSING

Being crepuscular smaller snakes, Ball Pythons prefer dark, quiet places where they feel safe from predators and exposure. Originating from Sub-Saharan Africa, they need warmer temps (85-88 degrees on the warm side) and moderate humidity (55-70%). Your cool side should not dip below 75 degrees. All of this means that a glass tank snake kit from your local pet store is not ideal.

At KP we recommend keeping your Ball Python in a PVC (or well-sealed wood) reptile enclosure or a rack system. Both are much easier to maintain steady temps and humidity. They also take up less room, are lightweight, and are easier to clean. PVC enclosures can be stacked right on top of each other! Racks accommodate short/low plastic tubs that ball pythons do very well in. They are very easy to maintain proper temps and humidity and they provide a very stress-free environment.

Glass terrariums and converted fish tanks are not ideal for ball pythons, but they can be made to work. Please visit our website for tips on how to modify your tank to make it more suitable for your new snake.

ENCLOSURE SIZE RECOMMENDATION

Snake Size	Tub/Rack Size	Enclosure Size (L x W)	Glass Tank Equivalent
80 – 999 grams	28 – 32 qt	24-30" x 12-18"	20-gallon long
500 – 1,999 g	32 – 45 qt	36" x 18-24"	40-gallon breeder
1,000 g +	41 – 54 qt	48" x 18-30"	75-90 gal or 55-gal breeder

**We do not recommend 120-gallon enclosures or 2' tall enclosures as they are difficult to heat at ground level and the extra height is unnecessary.*

HEATING, HUMIDITY, & SUBSTRATE:

Temp Range, ambient air temps: 75-80°F cool side, 85-89°F warm side

Humidity: 60-75% with a bump to 80-85% during a shed cycle

Enclosure temperatures should be measured with a digital thermometer at ground-level. Dial gauges are not accurate. Over-head heat is recommended in most situations, either a metal dome with a heat emitter bulb or a radiant heat panel installed on the ceiling of a solid top PVC or wood enclosure. Heat bulbs should be ceramic heat emitter or deep heat projector. **Never use white, red, or any color light bulb.** *Your snake will still be able to see red or night lights, never having full dark/night.* Racks or bins can be heated with heat tape or a heat mat. All heat sources should be controlled using a thermostat regulator to ensure temps remain consistent and within safe parameters.

The best substrate for ball pythons is one that will hold humidity well without molding. Coconut Husk products are great; we recommend the chunky version as it's less messy than the finer dirt-like coco coir. Cypress mulch is also good substrate. Add water directly to the substrate to keep humidity up, do not mist the enclosure.

HIDES & LIGHTING:

In an open enclosure or large rack tub, your snake needs hides, one on the hot side and one on the cool side at the very least. We prefer plastic hides as they are easily cleaned. Appropriate snake hides will be tight fitting for the snake with only one **small** entrance. The snake should feel hidden when inside. Additional clutter in the way of fake plants and cork flats are also useful to help your snake feel more at home. Just be sure there are no openings or loops that your snake can crawl through and get stuck, as well as no sharp edges.

Ball pythons do not require UVB lighting as they do not often bask in nature unless they are particularly cold. Ambient room lighting from a window is generally enough to give your snake a day/night cycle even in a rack set-up. In an enclosure, adding LED or UVB lighting is fine for aesthetics or if you have living plants. Some people prefer to give their snakes the option to access UVB light as they would have in nature. Appropriate lighting for this shy, crepuscular species should be dim and on a timer for no more than 6-12 hours a day. UVB should be for tropical or shade-dweller species with a UV rating of 3-7%. Adding additional fake plants or clutter is necessary to make your snake feels more secure while having a lit enclosure. Just be sure to replace your UVB bulbs every 6-12 months as the UV coating wears off and provides no benefit when it does.

We do **NOT** recommend using bright basking heat lights, halogens, or bright full sun grow lights inside or over your ball python enclosure. Any light can be stressful for this species and bright light even more so.

If your snake has enough hides and your husbandry is spot-on, he will spend 90% of his life hiding. If your young BP roams the enclosure daily or climbs a lot, then he's likely stressed and unhappy with his environment. **A happy BP is a hidey BP!**

Visit our website for more tips, tricks, and information on Ball Pythons and other reptile species. <http://kpexotics.com>

