**Boas & Pythons – Care Sheet**

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**Ball Python:** *Python regius*

**Red-Tailed Boa:** *Boa constrictor*

Boas and pythons are popular choices for people who want to own snakes. While they are usually docile toward humans, some of these snakes can grow quite large and live long lives. This means providing proper care can be a larger time investment compared to some other exotic animal species. Snakes are also very good at taking advantage of any possible escape route. It is important to know your obligations as your snake’s owner to help it live a happy, healthy life. Below is some general information on the care of these species, although you should always thoroughly research the specific care requirements of your chosen snake species.

**Basic Info**

Age: 20-30 years with proper care

Length: 3-5 feet (ball python), 6-10 feet (red-tailed boa)

Weight: While the ball python will average around 3-4 lbs., the boa can weigh much more.

**Behavior**

All of these snakes are popular choices because of their easy-going natures. They adjust quite well to captivity. While some of these snakes may be too shy to enjoy being held, others take quickly to it or will tolerate it. These snakes get stressed out easily, so it is important to pay attention to their behaviors and body language. None of these snakes are venomous. Instead, they are constrictors, which means they wrap themselves around their prey and squeeze them. However, they may still bite if they are scared enough, and it can be painful.

**Diet**

In captivity, these snakes will do well with a diet of mice and rats. As your snake grows older and larger, it will be necessary to increase the size of the prey. A good approximation is that it should be no bigger than the width of your snake. We also recommend frozen, thawed prey instead of live prey. This will greatly reduce the risk of injury to your snake, both from parasites and from being bit or clawed. If you want to use live prey, supervise your snake while it hunts and eats. Some people will instead hold the thawed food with tongs and move it around.

These snakes also do not require frequent meals. In fact, once your snake is full grown, you may only need to feed your snake once a month. It is important to be aware of the risk of obesity, especially in boas and other similarly large snakes. They are opportunistic eaters, which means they will likely eat if you feed them, even if they do not need to.

Of course, make sure your snake always has fresh, clean water.

If they defecate in their bowl, change the water immediately.

The bowl should be large enough for the snake to fit in as they will soak in it to help with skin shedding.

**Environment & Caging**

In general, snakes should be housed alone. When deciding how to house your snake, it is important that your snake’s enclosure:

* Is easy for you to clean
* Provides plenty of room for your snake to move around
* Is well ventilated
* Is secured so your snake cannot escape
* Does not have any sharp points or edges
* Contains hide boxes and other areas where your snake can stay out of sight (this is essential to help your snake keep its stress level low)
* Is lined with a dry substrate, such as newspaper
* Has separate cool (80-85ºF) and warm (90-95ºF) ends. We recommend ceramic heat emitters or basking bulbs. Hot rocks in the cage can burn your snake, so it is best to avoid them. Under tank heaters can be used appropriately, but if being used with a glass tank it is important to make sure the snake cannot directly sit on the glass above the heater to prevent thermal burns.
* Is kept at a humidity level of around 60-70 percent. You can do this by misting the tank, covering a portion of the enclosure, or placing an aquarium air stone in the large water bowl. You can also provide a “humid hide.” This can be made with a Tupperware container with a hole in the lid, and you can place water, damp paper towels, or sphagnum moss inside.

When it comes to size, a ball python will require less space than a red-tailed boa. In general, the larger the enclosure the better. Take space concerns into account before bringing any of these snakes home.

**Veterinary & Preventive Care**

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months. A vet will perform a fecal examination for parasites, and can order blood work and check for mites and ticks if necessary. If your snake was caught in the wild, it is important to have it checked out by a vet, because it may have parasites. Other health issues to check for can include respiratory ailments, skin infections, obesity or weight loss, and shedding issues.