

Ball Pythons *(Python regius)*

Introduction to Ball Pythons

The Ball Python is the smallest of the African python species. In nature, it is found living in central and western Africa. The majority of ball pythons imported into the U.S. originated from Benin, Ghana, and Togo. Ball Pythons small for pythons and are robust and heavy-bodied. The adults reach 36" to 40", with females generally larger than males. Hatchlings usually emerge at 8" to 12".

Ball Pythons can become very tame, however as small babies, they are quite secretive and nervous. They will spend most of their time coiled in a tight ball or hiding in their shelters. As they grow (and are held more often by the keeper) they become less timid and will actually begin to explore their enclosure and climb about on the keeper's hands. (Be careful as they can disappear quite quickly when you run to the kitchen for a drink or take a phone call.)

By nature, Ball Pythons are secretive and spend most of their days hiding in tight-fitting shelters. They are nocturnal so are more active at night. They typically don't bite, instead choosing to coil tightly into the ball with their head tucked safely inside that gives them their common name. As they grow, they will become more tame and make wonderful pets.

Enclosure

Adult Ball Pythons require a terrarium that is roughly 36" long x 18" wide x 12" tall, or 24" long x 12" wide x 12" tall for a younger python. Hatchling Ball Pythons will thrive in a smaller enclosure, approximately 10" wide and 12" long (roughly the size of a ten-gallon terrarium). The enclosure should always be large enough to provide the Ball Python with a warm side and cool side. This can be accomplished best by placing a small heating pad under one corner on the outside of the enclosure. The ideal temperature range is 80° to 85 °F during the day and a warmer area that remains in the 88° to 90° F range. They can easily tolerate a drop at night to 75° F.

Pythons that are kept too cool can get respiratory issues that can be life-threatening. Signs of problems include frequent yawning, gaping, gasping or opening of the mouth, and bubbling from the nose. Seek veterinary help if you see a combination of any of

Substrate

Most keepers place young Ball Pythons on a substrate of paper towel. It is easy to clean, inexpensive, and allows a keeper to closely monitor the enclosure for cleanliness, fecal material, etc. For a more naturalistic setup, keepers are using a mixture of 75% sand and 25% peat moss or coconut fiber. Aspen bedding works well too. We do not recommend using newspaper and cedar shavings are toxic to reptiles.

One cage accessory that is a must for a Ball Python is a hide box. These are secretive snakes that will spend a great deal of their time hiding. The snake should be allowed to wedge itself tightly into the shelter so it will feel secure. Commercial plastic shelters, clay flowerpots, and a variety of other shelters can be used.

Watering Ball Pythons

Your Ball Python should always have access to fresh, clean water. A shallow water dish works well. The python will usually climb in and may get water on the substrate. If this happens, the substrate should be changed or alternatively, the python can be soaked in a separate water dish outside of the enclosure once a week.



Feeding Ball Pythons

Ball Pythons are predators that feed on rodents. They will eat mice and rats throughout their lives. Small Ball Pythons will feed on small "fuzzy" mice (once a week) and will begin to consume larger mice and even small rats as they grow. Adults will feed on adult mice or small rats (one or two every week to ten days).

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