

# Ball Python

- **Common Group:** PYTHON SNAKES
- **Common Name:** Ball Python
- **Scientific Name:** Python regius
- **Distribution:** West Africa
- **Size:** 3 1/2' - 5'



## Natural History

Ball pythons, or royal pythons as they are sometimes referred, are endemic to tropical western Africa, with the majority originating in the countries of Ghana and Togo. These snakes are secretive by nature, spending much time in underground burrows or abandoned termite mounds.

Ball pythons in the wild can be found in a wide range of habitats including rainforests, savannahs, and even human-inhabited agricultural zones. As per their vernacular name, "ball" pythons have a fascinating habit of coiling into a tight ball if they feel threatened. In captivity this behavior is most common among babies, or recently imported adults that are unaccustomed to human contact.

## Recommended Reading

- [The Ball Python Manual](#)
- [The Complete Ball Python Book](#)

## Size and Longevity

Ball pythons are among the smaller species of pythons commonly available to hobbyists. They typically measure 10 to 15 inches as hatchlings, and adults may reach lengths of 3.5 to 6 feet with just over 4 feet being average. Females are usually longer and more heavy bodied than males.

Properly cared for ball pythons can be expected to live for over 20 years. In fact, the oldest snake ever kept in captivity was a ball python, caught in the wild as an adult, that had been in captivity for 48 years when it died at the Philadelphia zoo!

## Housing

Despite their modest length, ball pythons are heavy bodied snakes, and should be provided with an enclosure large enough for comfortable movement. Hatchlings up to one year of age can be housed in a standard **10 or 20 gallon terrariums**, with a footprint of 12"x20" and 12" x 30" respectively. A single adult would be comfortable in **amid-sized cage**. These snakes typically do not climb, so additional floor space should be a priority over height.

**Vision cages** are an excellent option to maintain an ideal cage environment, holding heat and humidity at a stable level ideal for these snakes. Larger **glass enclosures**, which are difficult to ship and must be found locally, make beautiful display cages.

## Heating and Lighting

These snakes are primarily nocturnal, and do not require UVB lighting to thrive in captivity. However, use of a full spectrum light with low UVB output, such as a **2.0 bulb** can be beneficial for promoting a regular photo-period, and displaying the snake to its best colors. If **live plants** are used, a full spectrum light will be necessary to encourage them to grow.

However, as tropical snakes, they do require a heat source that can maintain an ambient daytime temperature of 80 degrees, with a basking spot around 95 degrees. These temperatures can easily be achieved via the use of **heat bulbs**, **ceramic heat emitters**, and **heat pads**. In fully enclosed cages such as vision cages and penn plax cages, use of a **radiant heat panel** can be a convenient and unobtrusive way to heat the cage.

Nighttime temperatures can be 10 to 15 degrees cooler overall, and usually little adjustment is needed on your part, as the typical home is cooler at night than during the day.

Use of a **thermometer**, especially one that records a **min and max temperature** within the cage, is recommended.

# Substrate and Furnishings

In the wild, these pythons tend to inhabit savanna and grassland habitat, residing primarily underground in rodent burrows. Underground, the relative humidity is much greater than above ground, so while the savanna is not known for being particularly moist, these pythons do thrive best with a **secure hide** that is also packed with damp **moss**. The damp moss and tight quarters help these shy snakes to feel safe and secure.

**Reptile bark (orchid bark)**, **cypress mulch**, **pulverized coconut husk (bed-a-beast)**, or a mixture of both are prime choices.

Avoid any excessively drying bedding including pine shavings, sand, or paper products. And never use a cedar bedding...cedar is toxic to all snakes!

When designing a terrarium for this species, keep in mind its secretive nature. Provide ample **places to hide** on both the warm and cool regions of the enclosure. **Half-logs**, **cork flats**, **cork rounds**, and **grapewood** all make excellent hides for ball pythons. Additional climbing structures (sticks, rocks, plants, etc.) may be used, but avoid over-crowding the tank.

# Water and Humidity

Water should always be made available to ball pythons in a **sturdy dish** large enough to allow for occasional soaking. Water should be checked daily, and replaced immediately if fouled.

Ball pythons require localized areas of high humidity within their cages. Once or twice daily misting of the entire enclosure with room temperature water in a **hand spray bottle** should be adequate in most situations. Do not allow the substrate to become saturated. A good misting schedule should result in the bedding drying out almost completely between mistings. Use of a **cage fogger** is another simple way to increase humidity in the cage without completely soaking the bedding. The rolling mist the fogger typically creates also makes for a natural, tropical effect within the cage!

# Nutrition

All snakes are carnivores, and ball pythons are no exception. In captivity a diet of **mice** and **rats**

will suffice. Even hatchling balls are capable of subduing and swallowing **small, adult mice**, while adults may require **large rats**. Do not be deceived by the small head and neck of these snakes. Prey size should be based on the girth of the snake at its fattest point. An appropriately sized meal should leave a noticeable lump in your python.

Generally food items should be offered once a week for the snakes entire life. However, this regimen may change based on the age of the snake, time of year, and pre and post breeding conditions.

## Handling

Ball pythons are by far one of the easiest snake species to handle. Although hatchlings can be nervous and nippy, this behavior usually disappears within the first few months of life. As naturally shy animals, ball pythons tend to be slow moving, and content to casually explore their surroundings by crawling through ones hands.

To avoid stress and related health issues (namely lack of appetite) handling should be limited with young or newly acquired animals to a few times a week. Once you have become familiar with the specific routines and tolerances of your pet, you can increase handling times as appropriate.