

# Ball Python

- 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](#)
- ❖ [Complete Ball Python](#)
- ❖ [Pythons of the World, Vol II: Ball Pythons](#)

## 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 3-1/2 to 6 feet with just over 4 feet being average. Females are usually longer and heavier 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, which 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 gallon terrarium, with a footprint of 12" x 20" respectively. A single adult would be comfortable in a 20 gallon long terrarium or a mid-sized cage. These snakes typically do not climb much, so additional floor space should be an observed priority over height.

[Vision Cages](#) are an excellent option to maintain an ideal cage environment, holding heat and humidity at stable levels ideal for these snakes. Larger glass enclosures (such as a 40 gallon breeder terrarium), which are difficult to ship and best found locally, make beautiful display cages as well when setup properly.

When breeding, using a [rack system](#) with tubs is a great option to maximize space and room for your snakes. While not as attractive as a terrarium or cage on a visual level, rack systems are very good at providing all the needed heat and humidity requirements at stable levels due to the fully enclosed nature of the units.

## Heating and Lighting

These snakes are primarily nocturnal, and do not require UVB lighting to thrive in captivity, but being somewhere with natural daylight available, even indirectly, would help for a natural photo period. As tropical snakes, they do require a heat source that can maintain a hotspot of ~95 degrees with an ambient temperature in the lower 80s. These temperatures can easily be achieved via the use of heat bulbs, ceramic heat emitters, and Under Tank Heat(UTH) pads when using a glass terrarium setup. In fully enclosed cages like [vision cages](#), or our [pvc cages](#), use of a radiant heat panel can be a convenient and unobtrusive way to heat the cage. As for night temperatures, a drop of 10-15 degrees overall is acceptable, but not totally necessary. Use your best judgement. Use of a thermostat is recommended for all heating devices and is required for heat panels and heat tape heating sources. Thermometers are recommended in the cage where possible.

## Substrate and Furnishings

In the wild, these pythons tend to inhabit savanna and grassland habitat, residing primarily underground in rodent burrows and abandoned termite mounds. Underground, the 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 has some damp [moss](#). The damp moss and tight quarters help these shy snakes feel safe and secure, especially in an all glass terrarium.

When it comes to the substrate, use of clean mulch products, like [ReptiBark](#), can provide good humidity retention along with some natural coconut products like: [Coco Husk](#) or [Reptichip](#). We use [finely shredded aspen](#) bedding for the animals in our collection and it provides good natural behaviors and we have had much success with it over the years.

Avoid the use of excessively dry beddings including: pine shavings, sand, or paper products. 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 sides of the enclosure to allow for thermoregulation. The most important thing to do is try not to over crowd the enclosure, and remember, the more decorations, the more to clean.

## Water and Humidity

Water should always be readily available to ball pythons in a sturdy dish, large enough to allow for occasional soaking. Water should be checked regularly and changed as needed.

Ball pythons require localized areas of higher humidity in their enclosures and a light misting of the entire enclosure is recommended, specifically in a glass terrarium where the humidity dissipates quickly. The use of a timed misting system or cage fogger can help to maintain adequate levels. In a rack system environment, a large enough water source should provide ample humidity for the daily needs of your ball python, with misting done more specifically to elevate humidity during molting(shed) cycles. Too much humidity can be bad for prolonged periods, so do not overdo it.

## Nutrition

All snakes are carnivores, and ball pythons are no exception. In captivity, a diet of mice and rats will suffice. These are readily available at most pet stores and through numerous feeder animal distributors like, [Big Cheese Rodent Factory](#) and [Cold Blooded Cafe](#), to name some. Hatchlings are capable of subduing and swallowing hopper mice, while adults can easily eat large rats. Do not be deceived by the small head and thin neck of these snakes. Prey size should be selected based on the girth of the snake at its fattest point. An appropriately sized meal should leave a noticeable lump in your ball python.

Generally, food items should be offered once a week for animals under 3ft in length (hatchling to 1-1/2 yrs old) and it can be slowed to every two weeks for larger animals (1-1/2+ yrs). This regimen may change based on the time of the 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 your hands.

To avoid unnecessary 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. On a side note, kissing your pet is not recommended.

If you have any more questions regarding the care of your new ball python, feel free to ask us  
anytime via

Email: [Logan@infinityreptiles.net](mailto:Logan@infinityreptiles.net)

Or

Phone: 972-322-6753