

Caring for your corn snake

**How to keep pet corn snakes
healthy and happy**



Notcutts

GARDEN INSPIRATION SINCE 1897

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Are corn snakes right for me?

If this is your first snake, then a corn snake is a good choice for beginners. Generally good natured and available in many different colours and patterns, corn snakes are an interesting and safe first pet snake.

Although young corn snakes start off quite small, they can grow to around 6 feet in length and can live up to 20 years or more if they are well looked after.

Corn snakes eat rodents so you will need to be comfortable with defrosting and feeding mice and rats.

Corn snakes come from the mixed woodlands and rocky hillsides of the Central, Southern USA and Northern Mexico. They are all captive bred.

Choosing a new pet corn snake

When selecting your corn snake, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Frequent and rapid tongue movements
- Firm and muscular body
- Smooth and shiny skin (with no lumps or blemishes)
- Active, moving freely
- Good appetite, eating regularly
- Clear eyes (unless he is shedding his skin at that time, then it is normal for eyes to go cloudy)

The first few days

We advise buying and setting up your vivarium for at least a week before bringing your new snake home. This gives you time to get used to setting the temperature just right, creating the ideal environment for him to settle in.

When you bring him home, place the tub or bag containing your snake inside the vivarium and open it carefully to allow him to come out. Close the door securely and turn the lights off to minimise stress. Keep the lights off until the next morning when you can check on your snake.

We recommend that you keep handling to a minimum during the first week until he is more comfortable in his new home and is feeding regularly.

Creating a happy home

Your corn snake will need an escape-proof vivarium with good ventilation.

Initially when your snake is young, a smaller vivarium is needed to make your corn snake feel secure and safe. Please ask our pet centre team for advice on the appropriate size for your young snake.

Eventually you'll need a vivarium at least 92cm x 38cm x 38cm as an adult corn snake will reach up to 180cm long.

The floor of your vivarium should be covered with a suitable dry layer such as aspen wood shavings, coconut bark or cypress mulch.

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Heating and lighting

All reptiles are cold blooded and therefore rely on an external heat source to maintain their body temperature.

Corn snakes need a range of temperatures in their vivarium. Heat should be at one end of the vivarium allowing your snake to warm up while the other end should stay cool.

You will need a thermometer at each end of the vivarium to monitor this range. The cooler end should be a temperature of 25°C and 30°C at the heated end. This should be controlled with a good quality thermostat that is designed to be used with a heat mat.

Corn snakes don't need lighting as such but will tolerate illumination once established. Hatchlings should be kept in subdued lighting.

Your snake will suffer if there is too much humidity and poor ventilation so it is important that this is controlled and monitored precisely.

Decoration

Caves and hidey holes should be created in your snake's vivarium at both ends to give him some privacy and rest places whilst he is asleep.

Water

Corn snakes need a no tip water bowl which is big enough for them to submerge themselves in fully. This is especially important while they are shedding their skin. Water bowls should be cleaned out, dried and refilled with fresh water every day to prevent the build-up of harmful bacteria.

Cleaning

As soon as you see any droppings or uneaten food, remove them. It is important to replace all of the vivarium floor layer regularly and thoroughly clean the whole vivarium with a good quality reptile disinfectant.

Kitchen sinks should not be used for bathing reptiles or cleaning reptile's dishes or vivariums. If bathtubs are used for these activities, they should be cleaned thoroughly with disinfectant.

A healthy diet and treats

Corn snakes are carnivorous and feed on mice or rats.

They eat their food whole so it should be a maximum of 1 and a half times the diameter of your snake's mid body.

Young corn snakes should be fed every 2 to 5 days. Adults can be fed less often, only every 7 to 14 days.

Frozen rodents can be stored in the deep freezer for several months. We recommend frozen rodents are stored securely, wrapped in a polythene bag secured within a rigid, airtight plastic box. Ensure that frozen rodents never come into direct contact with human food.

The safest way to defrost rodents is naturally at room temperature. Spread mice evenly over some newspaper or absorbent kitchen towels and cover with the same. Allow to defrost overnight or for several hours on a warm surface. Make certain the rodents are thoroughly defrosted before

feeding. Carefully dispose of the newspaper after use and disinfect any surfaces which may have some into contact with them.

We strongly advise against rodents being defrosted in the microwave or in warm water.

Offer food to your pet using long tweezers or forceps which prevent fingers being nipped by 'enthusiastic feeders' also further reducing the risk of contamination. Always thoroughly wash your hands and any equipment used in warm water and a suitable disinfectant after feeding, cleaning out or handling your pet.

You do not need to feed your snake with live food.

Getting to know you

Corn snakes rarely bite but do need time to get used to being handled.

Smaller corn snakes can be delicate and young children should always be supervised when handling them.

Your movements should be slow and gentle but confident. Hold your snake loosely but support his whole body.

It is important that you only handle your snake for up to 15 minutes at a time as his core temperature is at risk of dropping too low.

Always wash your hands before and after handling your snake.

Corn snakes and other pets

Corn snakes are solitary by nature but can be kept in small groups providing there is sufficient space.

Corn snake skin shedding

All reptiles shed their skin and corn snakes will generally shed in one large piece if given the right humidity and allowed a water bowl large enough to fully soak in.

You can tell when your snake is beginning this process because his eyes will become cloudy. We advise against handling your snake while he is skin shedding as this can damage the fragile layers of new skin.

After a few days your snake's eyes will clear and his new skin will be revealed with brighter colours and often an iridescent sheen while the new skin is still fresh.



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Potential health issues with corn snakes

Respiratory problems

You will notice this issue if your snake's mouth is gaping and or there is a bubbly mucus coming from his mouth or nostrils. Mouth gaping could also be a sign of a mouth infection. If either symptom is spotted, seek veterinary advice straight away.

Finding a vet

If you have any concerns about the health of your corn snake, please consult your local vet as soon as possible. All vets have a basic understanding of reptiles, but a reptile specialist may be worth finding just in case.

Pet insurance for your corn snake

You can insure your corn snake under most exotic pet insurance plans or specific snake insurance. We always recommend taking pet insurance wherever possible.

Your new pet checklist

- Vivarium or tank – not too large for young snakes
- Heat mat or lamp
- Disinfectant
- Lamp protector
- Thermostat
- Large water bowl (big enough for your snake to submerge himself in)
- Thermometers x 2
- Frozen food (pinkies or mice appropriate to the size of your snake)
- Cage furnishings
- Bedding

Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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