



Wet Pets N Critters

Garter Snake Care Guide

Garter snakes are popular beginner reptiles due to their small size, hardy nature, and interesting behavior. They are non-venomous, generally docile, and easy to care for when provided with the right setup.

Basic Information

- **Scientific Name:** *Thamnophis spp.*
 - **Average Lifespan:** 8–12 years with proper care
 - **Adult Size:** 2–4 feet long
 - **Temperament:** Generally calm but can be quick; may musk when stressed
 - **Diet:** Carnivore (primarily small fish, earthworms, and pinky mice)
-

Housing

- **Tank Size:**
 - A **20-gallon long tank** is a good minimum for one adult garter snake.
 - Larger tanks provide more space for movement and enrichment.
 - **Substrate:**
 - Aspen shavings, reptile bark, or paper towels. Avoid cedar or pine as they can be toxic.
 - **Hides & Enrichment:**
 - Provide at least two hides (one on the warm side, one on the cool side).
 - Add branches, fake plants, and a water dish large enough for the snake to soak in.
 - **Temperature:**
 - Warm side: **80–85°F**
 - Cool side: **70–75°F**
 - Nighttime temperatures can drop slightly but should not go below **65°F**.
 - Use a **heat mat or ceramic heat emitter** if needed—avoid heat rocks.
 - **Lighting:**
 - Garter snakes do not require special UVB lighting but benefit from a regular **day/night cycle** using ambient room light or a low-wattage bulb on a timer (12 hours on, 12 hours off).
 - **Humidity:**
 - Garter snakes prefer moderate humidity. Mist lightly if needed, but avoid excessive moisture.
-

Diet

- **Main Diet:**
 - Earthworms (no red wigglers, as they are toxic to snakes)
 - Small fish like minnows, guppies, or smelt (avoid goldfish)
 - Pinky mice (frozen/thawed, optional for variety)
- **Feeding Schedule:**
 - Young snakes: Feed every 2–3 days
 - Adults: Feed every 4–5 days

Always remove uneaten food within a few hours.

Cleaning & Maintenance

- Spot-clean waste as needed.
 - Replace substrate fully every 4–6 weeks.
 - Clean the water bowl and provide fresh water daily.
 - Wash hands after handling to prevent the spread of bacteria.
-

Health Tips

- A healthy garter snake should be alert, have clear eyes, smooth scales, and a regular feeding response.
 - Signs of stress or illness include refusal to eat, excessive hiding, wheezing or clicking sounds, and dull, wrinkled skin.
 - If your snake sheds in pieces, increase humidity slightly by lightly misting or adding a damp hide.
-

Handling

Garter snakes can be quick and may musk (release a smelly substance) when startled. Handle them gently and regularly to help them become more comfortable. Always supervise young children when handling a garter snake.

Supplies Checklist

- 20-gallon tank or larger
 - Secure screen lid
 - Heat mat with thermostat (optional)
 - Hides (at least two)
 - Water bowl
 - Safe substrate (aspen, or reptile bark)
 - Thermometer and hygrometer
 - Feeding tongs (optional)
-