

**Always**

- Buy from a reputable breeder because a young, captive-bred corn snake is less stressed and more willing to eat than a frightened, wild-caught snake.
- Take your new snake to a reptile veterinarian for a general health exam and parasite test.
- Leave a newly purchased snake alone in its enclosure for 1-2 weeks to acclimate to its new home.
- The water bowl should be changed whenever it is dirty, or at least once a week.
- Provide heat to your snake by special reptile heating pads or incandescent light bulbs in reflector hoods; the use of "hot rocks" in the snake's enclosure should be avoided as they can cause serious burns.
- Interact with your corn snake during the evening hours when it is becoming active.
- Use a pillowcase or locking Tupperware container with holes in it as a transport container for short trips.

**Housing for your Corn Snake should:**

- be a relatively large enclosure.
- have access to fresh water in a bowl that is large enough for the snake to soak.
- include suitable substrates that are easy to clean: newspaper, paper towels, indoor-outdoor carpet, AstroTurf®.
- include branches for climbing.
- be escape-proof.

**It is important for Corn Snakes to avoid:**

- live prey that may injure them.
- unsuitable substrates such as cedar, corncob, wood chips/shavings, gravel, dirt or rocks.
- "hot rocks," which are considered a potential hazard.
- potentially toxic live plants.
- direct contact with heating elements.
- free roam of the house (to prevent trauma, ingestion of foreign materials and escape).
- soiled water bowl.
- cats, dogs and other pets.
- unsupervised children.



**Most Common Disorders of Corn Snakes**

- Intestinal parasites
- Dysecdysis (retained skin shed, retained eye spectacles)
  - Respiratory infections
  - Stomatitis (infection in the mouth)
  - Cloacal prolapse
  - Constipation
  - Dystocia/retained eggs
  - External parasites (mites and ticks)
  - Dystocia/retained eggs
  - Intestinal parasites
  - Cryptosporidiosis
  - Bite wounds from prey
  - Skin problems ("scale rot")
  - Trauma
  - Burns
  - Inappetance

Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your corn snake. For help in finding a reptile veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV) by visiting [www.ARAV.org](http://www.ARAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

**Additional Resources**

*The Art of Keeping Snakes (Herpetocultural Library)*

- Philippe de Vosjoli

*Corn Snakes: The Comprehensive Owner's Guide*

*(The Herpetocultural Library)* - Kathy Love and Bill Love

Published by



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# HOW TO KEEP YOUR CORN SNAKE HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE!



## CORN SNAKE

The corn snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*, formerly *Elaphe guttata*) is one of the best known and most popular snakes in captivity. The most familiar subspecies is the common corn snake or red rat snake (*P. g. guttatus*). Two snakes that were previously assigned to subspecies categories were recently designated as full species: the Great Plains rat snake or Southwestern rat snake (*P. emoryi*, formerly *P. g. emoryi*) and the Slowinski corn snake (*P. slowinskii*, formerly *P. g. slowinskii*). Their husbandry requirements are similar to the common corn snake. The common corn snake is distinguished by having brownish orange skin with orange/red saddles; the saddles have black borders and usually a black and white underbelly. After many generations of selective breeding, domesticated corn snakes are found in a wide variety of different colors and patterns: color morphs, such as Miami Phase, Okeetee Corns and Candy cane; pattern morphs like Aztec, Zigzag, Milksnake Phase and Motley; and compound morphs like Snow, Blizzard, Ghost and Phantom. There is also a wide variety of hybrids. A native of the United States, *P. g. guttatus* is found in the southeast, ranging from New Jersey to the Florida Keys and as far west as Texas. Corn snakes are primarily ground dwellers, but some are semi-arboreal. They dwell in pine forests, rocky outcrops/hills and around farms.

### What to Expect from Your Corn Snake

Snakes do not respond to their owners like dogs and cats do. Corn snakes are good beginner snakes because they are non-venomous and are easy to handle and care for. They spend much of their time coiled up in hiding spots. Corn snakes are most active at dawn, dusk and during the night.

Most are calm, docile, placid snakes that thrive in captivity.

### Is Your Corn Snake a Male or Female?

Corn snakes are difficult to sex. Usually females have a tail that tapers off quickly behind the vent, whereas males have a thick tail that tapers off slowly and is much longer. A reptile veterinarian should be able to "probe" your snake and determine gender with greater certainty.

### Restraint

Minimal restraint is recommended as corn snakes are normally very docile. The body must be fully supported. Corn snakes will not wrap snugly around your arm, but they tend to pick a direction and go, so the head can be gently guided in another direction as necessary.

### What and When to Feed Your Snake

In the wild, hatchlings feed largely on small lizards and tree frogs, while adults feed on small rodents and birds, killing their prey by constriction. In captivity, hatchlings can be easily started on pinkie mice (1-2 days old), quickly moving up the prey scale to fuzzies, hoppers and small adult mice. A live rodent should NEVER be left unattended with any snake. Most corn snakes will take thawed frozen rodents, which is the preferred method over live prey. Juveniles should be fed every 5-7 days; adults every 7-10 days. Snakes should be fed at night in a secure

## WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY CORN SNAKE

### Vital Statistics

#### Body length:

3-6 feet (91-183 cm)

#### Body weight:

age and length dependent

#### Age of sexual maturity:

18-24 months

#### Maximum life span:

10-20+ years (12-15 average)

● Active tongue that flicks when snake is handled

● Clear eyes

● Nostrils free of discharge



● Rounded body shape (not triangular shape)

● Clean vent area

● Clear, firm skin with no retained shed

● Gentle but firm grip

● Clear eyes

● Active tongue that flicks when snake is handled

● Nostrils free of discharge



**NOTE: Most, if not all, reptiles carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles, including corn snakes. For more information, please see the handout, Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.**

container that is separate from their home. As a general guideline, feed your snake after it has defecated. Corn snakes need water every day, but most people probably will not see their snake drink.

### Enclosure

A corn snake should be housed in at least a 20-gallon tank with a secure top, as they are known to be escape artists. As the snake grows, more space should be provided. The minimum length of the enclosure should be at least 2/3 of the snake's body length. Suitable substrates are newspaper, reptile carpet or paper towels. Fresh water to drink must be provided in a reasonably-sized bowl. They are solitary animals, so they are best housed alone in captivity. Hiding places should be available, as corn snakes become stressed if they cannot hide. It is important to have a hiding area on each end of the tank, so the snake does not have to choose between warmth and feeling secure. An interesting branch should be available for climbing and resting.

### Temperature and Humidity

A temperature gradient from 70-85 (21-29°C) should be maintained, with a basking area of 88-90°F (27-32°C). The temperature can fall to the lower range at night. Heat may be provided by special reptile heating pads or incandescent light bulbs in reflector hoods and placed to avoid direct contact with the snake. One end of the enclosure should be maintained at a higher temperature for basking. Normal household humidity (30-50%) is usually fine for corn snakes, but it may need to be higher if your snake has trouble shedding.

### Water

Corn snakes need a bowl of fresh water that is large enough for them to submerge their whole body in. Ensure that the bowl is not too deep for juvenile animals — approximately 1 inch (2.54 cm) of water. Because snakes often defecate in their water bowls, regular cleaning, disinfection and water changes must be scheduled at least weekly.