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**Ball Python Care Sheet**

*Care sheet for the ball python (Python regius)*

 Ball pythons are generally a bit shy at first, but they make for ideal pets, because they are of a small size, are generally friendly, are manageable to care for, and come in a remarkable array of colors and patterns. Ball pythons are native to central and western Africa and thrive in these warm, tropical areas. They are known as the royal python in many parts of the world. Ball pythons make for a quality pet for the first-time keeper.

*Ball Python Size*

Ball python hatchlings are approximately 10 inches in length. Adult female ball pythons average 3 to 5 feet long, and adult male ball pythons average 2 to 3 feet in size. This is a species in which mature females are typically much larger than the males. A 5-foot ball python is considered big, although lengths of 6 feet or more have been reported.

*Ball Python Life Span*

With proper care, ball pythons can live 30 years or more. The record age for a ball python is more than 40 years – so plan on a long life for your new pet.

*Ball Python Caging*

Ball python enclosures need to be full of clutter to provide security. Remember that the more you put in the cage, the more you must clean and disinfect on a regular basis. That said, there are different enclosures that work well for ball pythons PVC cages and any of the commercially available, plastic-type reptile cages. Glass reptile terrariums are adequate for ball pythons, but the screen tops on such enclosures can make it very difficult to maintain proper humidity levels and will need to be covered to keep humidity and heat in.

Juvenile ball pythons seem to do well in enclosures that make them feel secure. A small snake in a big cage can become overwhelmed and stressed so be sure to provide plenty of clutter. A 48-inch by 24-inch by 18-inch enclosure will more than comfortably house an adult ball python but the bigger the better as they do explore.

Spot-clean your ball python’s enclosure as necessary. Remove feces and urates as soon as possible. You can use a specialized cleaner to be extra safe, such as the Flukers Eco Clean Waste Remover or Chlorhexidine Disinfectant Solution (diluted with water). Do a complete tear-down every 30 days by removing all substrate and reptile accessories and completely disinfecting with a 5 percent bleach solution or the Chlorhexidine solution. Rinse the enclosure thoroughly with water and allow it to dry completely before replacing cage accessories and your snake.

The cage accessory that is required for a happy ball python is a couple of good hide boxes. Ball pythons are secretive snakes that appreciate and utilize hide spots. Provide one on each end of your python’s enclosure so that it doesn’t have to choose between temperature. Steer clear of the wooden logs as they are not enclosed and don’t provide security.

*Reptile Heating & Lamp Lighting*

Remember that enclosures must allow for a proper thermal gradient that the ball python can utilize, with a hotspot on one end of the enclosure and a cool spot on the other. Provide your ball python with a basking spot temperature of 88 to 96 degrees Fahrenheit and an ambient temperature of 78 to 80 degrees. The ambient temperature should not fall below 75 degrees. It is vitally important to know the temperatures at which you are keeping your snake(s). Do not guess! A great way to monitor temperature is to us a thermostat (see shopping list). Stick the thermostat probe between the heating pad that will be adhered to the outside bottom of one side and the actual enclosure if using a tub. If using a glass tank same. For PVC enclosures or glass tanks where you are using overhead heat, you will want to adhere the probe inside the enclosure to their basking spot making sure snake cannot move it. That way the heat will cut off when optimal temps are reached and turn back on as temps drop.

There are several types of snake heat sources that help heat a ball python enclosure. Under cage heating pads and tapes, ceramic heat emitters, basking bulbs are just a few. With heat emitters and basking bulbs, it is crucial to keep an eye on the humidity within the enclosure, especially if combined with a screen top, as both will dry the air quickly. Use thermostats, rheostats and/or reptile timers to control your heat source. Do not use hot rocks with snakes or any reptile as they can heat unevenly over too small of a surface area and can cause serious burns.

Supplemental lighting is not necessary for ball pythons, but if used should run on a 12/12 cycle, meaning 12 hours on and 12 hours off. Continuous bright, overhead lighting is stressful to snakes, especially a nocturnal species such as the ball python. Ball pythons seem to prefer humidity levels of 50 to 60 percent.

Maintaining proper humidity will allow your ball python to shed properly. GOVEE has a great product that you can download on your phone to always monitor the temps and humidity in cage by putting it in the cage (see link below). Providing a bowl big enough for snake to immerse themselves in and if needed on top of that misting every other day or as needed to maintain the proper humidity.

***Snake Substrate***

Cypress mulch and orchid bark are great substrates for controlling humidity but remember that too much humidity can be as detrimental (if not more) as too little. Never use any substrate containing cedar, as it contains oils that can be deadly to reptiles! Avoid sand, shavings, aspen and peat bedding. (See shopping list)

***What Food to Feed a Ball Python***

Feed your ball python an appropriately sized rodent weekly and adults over 1000g every other week. I suggest after dark as they are nocturnal. “Appropriately sized” means prey items that are no bigger in circumference than the ball python at its largest circumference. Ball pythons can eat rats from the time they are young. Do not handle your ball python for at least a day after feeding, as this can lead to regurgitation. Ball pythons can be fed live, frozen/thawed, or pre-killed rodents. Never leave a live rodent unattended with any snake, as they can injure the snake. For the first year you will need to feed it weekly 1 time. As they reach maturity you can go to 10-14 days apart.

Feeding Frozen Thawed- place your frozen rat in hot water- as hot as you can get it out of the tap- until well thawed. You will have to change it out a few times based on size to keep it hot. Dry the rat off and use feeding tongs to offer it to your snake. Hold the rat and wiggle it without touching the snake. They are attracted

to heat and movement. If he doesn’t take you can lay in tub, but I suggest not directly on substrate put on a plastic Tupperware lid or something flat. All snakes are different.

Ball pythons are well-known for not eating at certain times throughout the year, particularly in the winter months. Be prepared for the possibility of your ball python going off feed and keep an observant eye on the

snake’s overall condition and body weight. This is typically nothing to worry about with healthy, well-established pythons, although it can be extremely frustrating to the snake keeper. If your ball python is healthy, continue your husbandry routine as usual, but keep the amount of handling to a minimum. The snake will eventually resume feeding normally. Do not be alarmed if a well-started ball python goes off feed during the cooler, drier times of the year, as this is common in captivity. Snakes generally do not eat while they are in the shed cycle.

*Ball Python Water*

Always have fresh, clean water available for your ball python. Check the water daily. The size of the water dish is up to you. If it is large enough for the ball python to crawl in to and soak, sooner or later your snake will make the most of the opportunity – ball pythons seem to enjoy a nice soak from time to time. Ensure that the water bowl is not too deep for juvenile animals – 1 inch or so will suffice. Snakes of many species will defecate in their water bowls from time to time, so be prepared to clean and disinfect the water bowl. The water bowl should be cleaned and disinfected on a weekly basis. Having a spare water bowl for such occasions can be handy, so that one may be used while the other is being cleaned.

*Ball Python Handling and Temperament*

Ball pythons are generally shy and will spend much of their time hiding. Your ball python may initially see you as a threat and it must learn who you are. The goal is to establish trust between you and your snake.

Always support your ball python’s body and avoid fast movements. Once a ball python realizes that you will not hurt it, they often seem to enjoy being handled. Some ball pythons may try to hide when handled and occasionally there are ones that may even bite due to excessive fear. These ball pythons may require a bit more time to settle in and establish trust. A ball python’s bite is a superficial wound. If a snake looks like it is going to strike, it is best to not handle it. Relax when holding your animal – sit down and give the animal a chance to settle.

Some snakes may not eat for several hours or longer after being handled, so avoid handling if you plan to feed. After a snake has eaten it may be a good idea to limit the handling because it may be uncomfortable for the animal. Avoid putting your snake’s cage in a heavy traffic area, excessive movement, and other pets should be avoided.

***Ball Python***

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| **Weight** | **Prey Item** |
| Hatchling-150g | Rat Crawler |
| 150-400 g | Rat Pup |
| 400-600g | Weaned |
| 600-1200g | Small Rat |
| 1200-plus | Medium Rat |

*Shopping List for set up:*

This is the basic you can of course decorate it however you like adding greenery and if you choose a theme. Driftwood, rocks etc. are great too. Ball Pythons do love to explore at night so giving them some vertical area is always beneficial and rough surfaces such as larger rocks that they can’t swallow will give them something to rub up on while shedding. Pictures and links at end of sheet.

*Tub Set Up:*

Appropriately sized tub (target has the quality tubs with locking handles on all 4 sides. If using tubs with 2 handles be sure to secure other sides with binder clips to prevent escapee.

* Heat pad (should cover at least 1/3 of the bottom on 1 side) <https://amzn.to/3veWZjV>
* Water bowl (big enough for snake to get in and soak)
* Substrate (paper towels recommended for new babies) if not a hatchling, then cypress mulch can be used or a Soil/Sand Mix (60/40 blend)-pic below
* Thermostat (amazon has BN-Link which is decently priced) this is not something you want to skip getting to prevent burns and death. <https://amzn.to/3O9EXs8>
* Govee indoor Hygrometer on Amazon or one that does same thing in measuring temp and humidity. (link below) <https://amzn.to/3KMMETa>
* 2 hides (minimum) don’t make them too big, they like tight dark places.
* Décor- your choice here on what you want to decorate with. Greenery, driftwood etc. More clutter is better.

*Tank Set Up:*

Same as above but if you are choosing to add overhead heat as well make sure you have your probe appropriately placed to prevent overheating.

* 50 watts to start and if temps are not achieved bump up to 75 watts
* Ceramic Heat Emitter (again appropriately sized for correct heat) when lights go off the heat emitter should kick on to maintain heat at night<https://amzn.to/3E919y2>

Remember with tanks you will need to cover all vent on top other than where light is to keep humidity in tank. Can use thermal tape on outside or for more visual appeal go get some thin plexiglass sheets from Home Depot and cut to size.

 