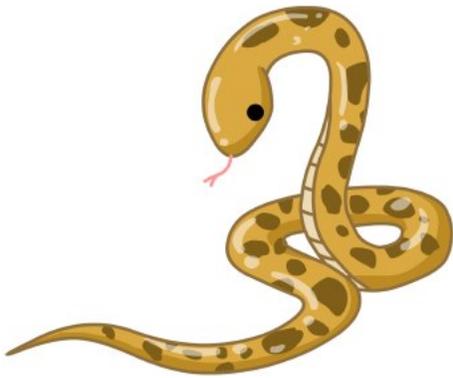




Snakes



A snake is an interesting and unusual pet. Medium-sized snakes make the best pets.

Snakes are clean, quiet, and, although not affectionate, can be tamed by handling and become gentle. Snakes are reptiles and thus are cold-blooded. This does not mean that their blood is cold, but rather that they can't control their temperature. Their bodies are only a few degrees warmer or colder than the air around them. A snake's forked tongue is what it uses to smell its surroundings. Its vision is very good but its hearing is not. It makes up for this by sensing vibrations on the ground. Your snake may not hear you shout, but could feel you walk up to it even if you tip-toed.

Selection

There are more than 1,300 kinds of snakes in the United States. Some snakes that might make good pets are the Gopher snake, King snake, Rat snake, Corn snake, and Common and Rosy Boas.

Before you choose a snake for a pet, learn all about its care, habitat, and feeding. Often snakes only eat live food - do you have access to feeding material?

You may choose to get your snake from a pet store or capture it in a field or forest. If you choose to catch your snake, there are several important things to do. **Never** hunt for snakes alone. Find out if there are dangerous snakes in your area. Wear the proper clothes and boots. Read about the kinds of snakes that make good pets, some never become gentle. Take a bag (a pillowcase will work) and something to tie it tightly closed. Spring and early summer are the best times to look for a snake.

Spring and early summer are the best times to look for a snake. Catch snake just behind the head; don't squeeze too hard, support the whole body and don't dangle it. This frightens the snake.

If you capture your pet from the wild and then decide not to keep it, be sure to return it to the same area.

When buying a snake from a pet store, it is a good idea to ask the store owner to stop feeding the snake for a short time. Then, when you can watch, offer it some food. This will tell you if the snake is a good eater. The second most important thing to watch for in buying a snake is how gentle it is.

Facilities

A snake's house is called a Serpentarium. The best housing is a glass or plastic aquarium as it is water proof and escape proof! The top or front of the serpentarium should be covered with fine mesh screen. Snakes must have warmth, so a light bulb can be used as a source of heat. However, the light should be positioned so that the snake can move away from it to a cooler area.

You should have a thermometer in the cage to insure that the temperature stays at about 75° to 80° in the day and no lower than 60° to 65° at night. Cover the floor of the cage with newspapers.

Use a heavy bowl for water, big enough for the snake to soak if it wishes. A rock for the snake to rub against or crawl under and a branch for it to climb on will complete your serpentarium. It is very important that the snake's home be made into a proper habitat - closely resembling its home in the wild. A serpentarium must be kept very clean and dry.

In putting the top (or front) on, be sure it is very tight and secure, as snakes can get through very small cracks. Also, use masking tape to cover rough edges. Snakes are very curious and can injure their noses by pushing or bumping against the cage.

It is possible to house more than one species of snake in your serpentarium. King snakes should **not** be housed with other kinds of snakes, however, because they will eat them.

Feeding

In nature, snakes eat many kinds of foods. All snakes are carnivorous, that is, meat eating. There are a few snakes living in the world that eat bird eggs. A snake likes to catch its food live and swallow it whole. Pet snakes will probably do well on mice and frogs. However, some can learn to eat scraps from freshly caught fish and even large worms. Some constrictor-type snakes prefer their food alive, but can be taught to eat dead food, if this is more readily available. If you have more than one snake in your cage, you should not feed them at the same time as they will fight over the food.

A snake's jaw is hinged in such a way that it can swallow food many times larger than itself. Most snakes have six rows of teeth, all pointing backwards to help hold their food.

Most medium-sized snakes need to eat only once a week. The bigger your snake, the more food it will need.

Always keep fresh water in a heavy, clean dish in your serpentarium.

If you caught your snake in the wild and it has not started to eat after three weeks, you should return it to the place where you found it.

Feeding mice to your snake can be expensive if you must buy them. You might wish to raise your own mice for food rather than catch or buy them.

Management

Pick up your snake with both hands, one just behind his head and the other supporting his body. Your snake should soon become tame and will crawl through your fingers and up your arms. Some snakes have become so gentle that they eat from their owner's hands.

If you are bitten while handling your snake, wash the bite and put on some first aid cream. Bites from non-poisonous snakes are no worse than bites from any small pet. No grooming or exercising is required.

Always wash your hands well after handling your pet or something in its habitat.

Health Care

Your snake should remain healthy if you keep the cage clean, feed the snake properly, water dish clean and filled with fresh water, and maintain the correct temperature in the serpentarium. Some snakes in captivity live 10 to 20 years.

Snakes are not affected by many diseases, but once they become sick it is difficult for them to recover.

Mouth Rot is a big problem. Snakes get this from dirty cages and water or another infected snake. If your snake refuses to eat, check its mouth *carefully* for white patches. You can use 2 parts Listerine to 1 part hydrogen to help heal the mouth. (Hydrogen Peroxide also can be used.) Use a cotton swab to apply the solution. Don't pull off the white patches.

If your snake gets cut, clean the wound and put some antibiotic cream on it.

Snakes can be bothered by mites. The snake will need to be treated and the serpentarium will need to be completely cleaned following directions from your veterinarian, herpetologist or the store where you purchased your snake.

Snakes can develop respiratory diseases if the temperature in their serpentarium is not kept warm enough. If your snake breathes through its mouth a lot, it could have an infection. The only cure for something like this is an antibiotic shot by a veterinarian.

From once a year to once or twice a month, your snake may shed its entire skin. The snake will soak in its water dish and sometimes rub against a rock as the skin comes off. The skin will usually come off in one piece, inside out.

Breeding

It is difficult to breed snakes in captivity, and it is probably best just to raise your snake as a pet. Some snakes lay eggs and others give birth to their young. Baby snakes take care of themselves as soon as they are born.

Economics

The cost of owning a snake varies greatly depending on the type of snake you acquire. Initial cost of the snake facility needs and diet can vary significantly between a garter snake and a boa!

Project Resources



Pinterest - The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards - Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for snake information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "snake" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example , try garter snake diet instead of snake diet.

The following links may be of interest:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snake>

<http://animalstime.com/facts-about-snakes-for-kids-snake-diet-habitat/>

Sections of the Snake Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



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