

# Ball Python



## *Python regius*

Native to central and western Africa, the ball python has become one of the most variable and prolific pet snakes in the world. This generally docile and tolerant species gets its name from its defensive posture where it will curl itself into a ball. At an average size of 3-4 feet (and a maximum of around 6 feet), the ball python will remain a manageable size for all of its 20-30 year life span.

## Housing

### Size

There are a variety of enclosure types that can be used for ball pythons, but whatever type you choose, it should grow with the snake. Putting a baby python in an enclosure that is too large can cause stress, leading to behavioral and feeding problems. A baby will do fine in an enclosure with a 20" x 10" foot print, like a 10 gallon tank, but you could go as large as 30" x 12". Ball pythons are largely terrestrial, but may do a small amount of climbing, so excess height on your enclosure would largely go to waste. For an adult ball python, a 36" x 18" enclosure should be the minimum size considered. If you're housing multiple snakes, you might want to consider plastic bins or sweater boxes in a rack system. Every enclosure should contain an appropriately sized hide and water dish.

### Substrate

Several suitable substrates are commercially available including cypress mulch, coconut fiber, and a fir-sphagnum mix. A finer bedding, like coconut fiber, is better for spot cleaning, which should be done as needed. Cypress mulch bedding is excellent for holding moisture and resisting mold. Aspen shavings are good for reducing odor. The pros and cons of all substrate types should be considered and the best option should be selected for your particular set up.

### Lighting

UVB lighting is not essential for ball pythons but can be a means of establishing a day-night cycle. Ball pythons are nocturnal, so excessive bright overhead lighting can be detrimental. If you decide to use UVB lighting for your python, it should be used on a 12-hours-on/12-hours-off cycle.



## Some products to look for

- Zoo Med Forest Floor Cypress Mulch
- Exo Terra Reptile Water Dish
- Zilla Rock Den
- Zoo Med Deluxe Collapsible Snake Hook
- Exo Terra Heat Wave Under Tank Heater
- Zilla Shed-Ease
- Zoo Med Dual Analog Thermo-hygrometer
- Exo Terra Mini Mister Hand Sprayer
- Zoo Med Wipe Out 1 Terrarium Cleaner



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## Temperature

Ball pythons, like most reptiles, need a temperature gradient across their enclosure. One side of the enclosure should have a basking spot that exceeds 90°F, while the ambient temperature on the cool side should fall in the upper 70's. This temperature gradient will allow your python to regulate its body temperature as it needs. You can achieve these temperatures using heat bulbs, under tank heaters, heat tape, or through a combination of the available options. If you choose to use a heat bulb, it is important to choose one designed for nighttime use so as to not stress your python with excess bright lighting.

## Humidity

Ball pythons do not have excessively high humidity requirements, so maintaining proper humidity should be an easy task. If you're using a glass aquarium with a screen top it may be necessary to cover a portion of the screen top to prevent evaporative moisture loss. Ball pythons like a humidity above 50%, with 55%-60% being ideal. Keeping proper humidity will help prevent respiratory infections and facilitate proper shedding. If you find your humidity dropping below desired levels you can increase the size of the water dish or mist the enclosure regularly to correct it.

## Diet

### Rodents

Ball pythons feed on rodents their entire lives. You should choose the correct size feeder for your python and feed no more frequently than once a week. The best way to choose the correct size prey for your snake is to select a feeder no larger than the largest part of your snake's body. Nutritionally speaking, switching your python from mice to rats as soon as you can is recommended. When your snake has moved on to larger prey, it is recommended to space out your feeding to once every two weeks (or even farther if your snake is eating very large meals). We suggest feeding your python frozen thawed prey as this is safest for your snake, but live prey is available as well. When feeding live prey, it is important not to leave your snake unattended with its food because live prey can injure your python, potentially fatally. A separate enclosure should be kept strictly for feeding. If you feed your snake in its normal enclosure frequently, it may begin to associate you with food and you may inadvertently trigger a feeding response upon entering its enclosure and get bitten. Ball pythons have a reputation for being finicky eaters and may decide to cease feeding for extended periods of time. Provided your python is not losing any weight and food refusal is not coupled with any other symptoms, this is nothing to be concerned about and your snake will eventually resume feeding.



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