



Ball Python Care Sheet

Enclosure

The more "stuff" you put in an Enclosure, the more "stuff" you have to clean & disinfect on a regular basis. There are many different enclosure that work well for ball pythons, including, but not limited to: plastic sweater boxes (i.e. Rubbermaid/Sterolite), melamine racks, Freedom Breeder Enclosures, and many of the commercially available plastic-type reptile Enclosure, (i.e. those from Vision Herp & other similar manufacturers). Glass aquariums & tanks are adequate but not the best; keep in mind that the screen tops on such Enclosures can make it very difficult to maintain humidity levels. So you need to cover part of the Enclosure top. A phone book works well and helps stop ball pythons from lifting the lid. Juvenile ball pythons seem to do well in smaller Enclosures that make them feel more secure; a small snake in a big Enclosure can become overwhelmed & stressed. It is common to keep hatchlings in a shoebox size Rubbermaid with air holes burnt or drilled in the lid and the lid secured with Velcro straps, rubber bands, or a weight on top (leaving air holes. Adult ball pythons do not require exceptionally large or elaborate Enclosure. A 36" x 18" x 12" Enclosure will more than comfortably house an adult ball python. Remember that ALL Enclosures must allow for a proper thermal gradient that the snake can utilize, with a hot spot on one end and a cooler spot on the other. The longer the Enclosure the better the gradient can be.

Substrate/Bedding

There are a few substrates that work well. Newspaper is the cheapest & easiest with regards to cleaning & disinfecting: out with the old, in with the new. Cypress mulch is great for controlling humidity, but remember that too much humidity can be as detrimental (if not more) as too little. If there is regular condensation in Enclosure it is too moist. Never use any substrate containing cedar, as this is deadly to reptiles!

Temperatures & Heating

Provide your ball python with a basking spot of 88-92 °F and an ambient (background) room temperature of 78-80 °F. The ambient temperature should not fall below 75 °F. It is vitally important to **KNOW the Temperatures** at which you are keeping your snake(s). **DO NOT GUESS!!** A great way to monitor temps is to use a digital indoor/outdoor thermometer with a probe. Stick the thermometer Probe to the under tank heat pad and the thermometer next to the cool end of the Enclosure, and you'll have both sides covered at once. The best way to regulate the heat is with a thermostat. The thermostat probe is fastened to the heat source and it turns the heater on and off to maintain the correct heat. A cheaper alternative is a rheostat or dimmer switch. These do not turn on and off they allow you to adjust the power level that the heat source operates on making it hotter or cooler. The problem with this control method is that it cannot adjust itself for the room temperature changing. So if it is going to be a hot summer day your room may start off in the high 60s and end up in the 90s. Your heat source will put out the same amount of heat all day and thus **over heat when the room is hot**. A thermostat would actually turn off the heat source when the room heated up. A thermostat is defiantly best. There are several ways to go about heating the Enclosure: under-Enclosure heating pads are the best method of heating. Ceramic heat emitters, basking bulbs (both regular daytime & red "night" bulbs) can be used outside of the Enclosure. **If you use lights to heat you must not use bright lights at night!** Ball pythons are nocturnal and need to have dark time to be happy. With heat emitters & bulbs it is necessary to really 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 timers to control your heat source. **Do not use hot rocks** with snakes as they often heat unevenly over too small of a surface area & can cause serious burns. **Do not use** any in Enclosure heaters snakes coil around them and can cause overheating and burns.

Humidity

Providing proper humidity for ball pythons is important, humidity level of 50% - 60%, are best for ball pythons.

1. Use cypress mulch or a similar substrate that can be misted & is mold-resistant. Cypress is good for this as it turns a tan colour when dry & a rich brown when wet, giving a visual clue as to when it needs to be dampened again.
2. Make a "humidity box" for your snake. This consists of packing a plastic container large enough for your snake to fit in with damp sphagnum moss (think well-wrung-out wash cloth to gauge moisture), cutting a hole in the top or side & placing it in your python's Enclosure so that it can access the box as it pleases. One of the biggest health problems in captive ball pythons is respiratory distress caused by the combination of low ambient humidity, improper ambient temperatures, and a screen-top. Keep in mind that if you have a screen top on the Enclosure you will probably want to cover it most or all of the way with plastic, a towel or some other means of keeping moisture from escaping. This is also where having proper, reliable ambient temperatures (back to that thermometer!) is important, as warm air holds more moisture than cool air. You want the Enclosure to be humid, not WET. A soggy Enclosure can eventually lead to bacterial & fungal infections and consequently, death.

Lighting

Supplemental lighting is not necessary for this species, but if used should run on a 12/12 cycle, meaning 12 hours on & 12 hours off or mirror the outdoor light. **Continuous bright, overhead lighting is stressful to snakes**, especially a nocturnal serpent such as this one. If the room has windows the natural light cycle is fine. **Caution!** If your room has windows make sure your snakes Enclosure is never in direct sun light it can over heat and kill your snake.

Water

Always make fresh, clean water available to your ball python. The size of the water dish is up to you. If it is large enough for the python to crawl into and soak, sooner or later your snake will make the most of the opportunity, and most seem to enjoy a nice soak from time to time. Ensure that the bowl is not too deep for juvenile animals - 1" or so will suffice. Snakes of many species will defecate in their water bowls from time to time, so be prepared for cleaning, disinfecting & a water change when necessary. It is often beneficial to have a spare water bowl for such occasions, so that one may be used while the other is being cleaned.

Accessories

The one Enclosure accessory that is beneficial to a happy ball python is a good hide box...maybe even a couple of them. Ball pythons feel safe in tight spots. They like to touch all sides of their hide. These are secretive snakes that appreciate & utilize a hide spot. Provide one on each end of your python's Enclosure so that it doesn't have to choose between temperature & security. Clay flowerpots, plastic flowerpot trays, and commercially available hide boxes all work quite well. **Caution!** If your hide has a hole cut in it make sure that as your snake grows the hole is big enough that the snake cannot get stuck in it. As your snake grows it will need bigger hides.

Feeding

Feed your ball python an appropriately sized rodent weekly. By "appropriately sized" we mean prey items that are no bigger around than the python at its largest point. Ball pythons can eat rats from the time they are young - starting off with rat pups or "crawlers" for younger snakes & moving up in size as the animal grows. Do not handle your snake for at least a day after feeding, as this can lead to regurgitation. Ball pythons feed best on live rodents but many can be converted to feeding on frozen/thawed or pre-killed rodents (**Caution!** Never thaw in microwave it will leave hot spots and partially cooked meat. Never re-freeze thawed prey it could form bacteria). **Never leave a live rodent unattended with ANY snake**. If your ball is not hungry it will not eat, they will just sit there and let the rodents chew on them. Ball pythons are well known for going on hunger strikes at certain times throughout the year, particularly in the winter months. Be prepared for the possibility of your snake 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 keeper. If your snake is healthy continue your husbandry routine as usual. Offer your ball python food every 7-14 days until interested in eating again, as the snake will eventually "turn back on" and resume feeding normally.

Maintenance

Spot-clean your snake's Enclosure as necessary. When feces/urates (White lumps of solid urine)/uneaten prey items are present, remove them as soon as possible. Clean & disinfect the water bowl on a weekly basis. Depending on Enclosure conditions, remove all substrate & Enclosure furniture and completely disinfect Reptile Disinfectant i.e. F10 Products approximately every 30 days. Rinse the Enclosure thoroughly and allow to dry before replacing Enclosure furniture & your snake.