



Ball Python

Python regius

BEGINNER · 3-5 FT ADULT · 20-30 YR LIFESPAN · NOCTURNAL · WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA

The classic first snake, and for good reason. Ball pythons are docile, modestly sized and famously long-lived. A well-kept animal will be with you for twenty to thirty years. They come from the grasslands of West and Central Africa, they work the night shift, and when they feel unsure they don't bite: they coil into the tight ball that gives them their name.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	78–85 °F
Basking surface	88–92 °F
Night	75–80 °F
Humidity	60–80%
UVB	Optional · Ferguson Zone 1–2
Diet	Mice & rats, frozen/thawed
Feeding cadence	Every 7–14 days
Adult size	3–5 ft
Lifespan	20–30 years



Ball pythons come in hundreds of morphs, and they fill breeder tables at every NARBC show.

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01

Temperament & Handling

Young ball pythons are shy, so expect a snake to spend its first months wedged into a hide and ball up when picked up. That is normal, not a defect. With calm, brief handling they settle into the tolerant, unhurried adults the hobby knows them for. Two habits pay off for life: support the body rather than gripping it, and leave the snake alone on feeding days while its response is keyed up.

02

Housing by Life Stage

A hatchling does not need, and genuinely does not want, an adult-sized enclosure. Start snug and secure, then scale up as the snake grows. Front-opening PVC enclosures are the hobbyist standard; whatever the box, it needs a locking lid, a warm end and a cool end, and at least **two snug hides** so the snake never has to choose between feeling safe and being at the right temperature.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	20×12×12	24×18×12	Security and stable temps matter more than floor space.
Juvenile	24×18×12	36×18×18	Feeding response is still settling; keep handling light around meals.
Subadult	36×18×18	48×24×18	Females start outpacing males noticeably.
Adult	48×24×18	60×24×18	4×2 ft is the modern welfare floor for full-grown females.

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H (Habitat-OS life-stage guidance).

03

Heat

Run a gradient, not a single temperature: ambient air in the high 70s to mid 80s, a basking surface of 88–92 °F at the warm end, and a night drop no lower than 75 °F. Put every heat source on a thermostat and verify with a probe or temp gun. A ball python kept chronically cool is the single most common route to a respiratory infection.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold the enclosure between 60 and 80% humidity, riding the upper half of that band when the snake goes into shed: a good shed comes off in one piece. A water dish big enough to soak in, refreshed with clean water, covers drinking and the occasional self-directed bath. If the dish tips and soaks the bedding, swap the wet substrate rather than letting the snake sit on it.

05

Substrate & Hides

Cypress mulch or coconut fiber hold humidity well; aspen works in drier homes. Plain paper towel is entirely fine for hatchlings and quarantine (easy to monitor, easy to replace). Never use cedar or other aromatic wood shavings, which are toxic to reptiles. Hides should be snug enough that the snake touches the walls: clay pots, commercial caves, even a cardboard box all work. One on the warm end, one on the cool end.

06

Feeding

Ball pythons are rodent specialists. Hatchlings start on small mice weekly and graduate to adult mice or small rats; a grown snake eats every 7–14 days. Frozen/thawed prey is the recommendation, safer for the snake and simpler for you. One honest warning: this species is notorious for seasonal fasting. A healthy adult skipping meals for weeks is an annoyance, not an emergency; track weight, not missed meals.

07

Health Red Flags

The one to memorize is respiratory infection, almost always traced back to a cold or damp setup: frequent yawning, open-mouth breathing, gasping, or bubbling around the nostrils. Any combination of those signs is a reptile-vet visit, not a wait-and-see. Beyond that, watch for stuck shed on the eyes and tail tip, and weigh the snake monthly. A scale catches problems months before your eyes do.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual — when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.