



Cornsnakes, Kingsnakes & Colubrids

Family Colubridae

BEGINNER • 2-5 FT ADULT • 15-20 YR LIFESPAN • CREPUSCULAR • THE AMERICAS

Corn snakes, kingsnakes, milk snakes and rat snakes are the workhorses of the hobby: hardy, endlessly varied in color, and content in simple setups. The corn snake is the family's benchmark, and the numbers on this sheet are its numbers. Most North American colubrids run close to them. Expect an alert, active snake that tames quickly and lives fifteen to twenty years.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	75–82 °F
Basking surface	84–86 °F
Night	70–75 °F
Humidity	40–60%
UVB	Optional (low level beneficial)
Diet	Mice, frozen/thawed
Feeding cadence	Every 7–14 days
Adult size	2–5 ft
Representative	Corn snake (<i>P. guttatus</i>)



Corn snake, the benchmark colubrid. Kings, milks and rat snakes follow the same playbook.

Photo: evangrimes / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Temperament & Handling

Colubrids are busy snakes; where a ball python sits, a corn snake patrols. Hatchlings may buzz their tails and bluff, but a few short, calm sessions a week turn nearly all of them into confident handlers. They are also the hobby's great escape artists: a gap the width of a pencil is an open door, so buy locking latches before you need them.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Start hatchlings in small, tight quarters (a secure tub beats a huge tank they'll hide in) and upgrade as they grow. Adults appreciate more room than their reputation suggests, and despite being 'terrestrial' they climb enthusiastically when given branches. Two hides minimum, warm end and cool end, always.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	16×8×8	20×12×12	Escape artists from day one: secure every seam.
Juvenile	20×12×12	24×18×12	Strong feeders; a routine establishes fast.
Subadult	36×18×12	48×18×18	Active cruisers that use climbing branches.
Adult	48×24×18	60×24×24	4×2 ft is the modern floor; height earns its keep here.

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

03

Heat

Keep the warm end in the low-to-mid 80s with ambient air in the high 70s, dropping to 70–75 °F at night. A snake that eats but keeps regurgitating is very often just too cool to digest. Check the warm-side floor temperature before anything else. Every heat source goes on a thermostat.

04

Humidity & Water

These are dry-side snakes: 40–60% humidity is plenty. A water bowl and a damp sphagnum shed-box during the blue phase cover their moisture needs. Constantly wet bedding causes far more problems for colubrids than dry air ever will.

05

Substrate & Hides

Aspen is the classic choice: they burrow through it and it holds tunnels. Cypress works in more humid homes. Skip cedar and other aromatic shavings entirely; the oils are toxic to reptiles. Provide at least two snug hides plus clutter (cork, fake plants) so the snake can cross the enclosure without feeling exposed.

06

Feeding

Frozen/thawed mice, sized about 1.25× the snake's widest point, every 7 days for youngsters stretching toward 10–14 days for adults. One family rule matters more than all others: **kingsnakes eat other snakes**. House and feed every colubrid alone. Two snakes meeting over one mouse ends with one snake.

07

Health Red Flags

The most common 'illness' in colubrids is an empty cage. Recheck your latches. On the animal itself: wheezing or bubbling at the nostrils means a vet visit; repeated regurgitation means the warm side is too cold or the prey too large; and tiny moving dots around the eyes after a show or new arrival are mites. Quarantine new snakes for 30 days as standard practice.

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.