



DeKay's Brown Snakes

Storeria dekayi

INTERMEDIATE · 9–13 IN ADULT · 7–10 YR LIFESPAN · SLUG EATER · EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

You have probably already met this snake. DeKay's brown snake lives under boards and flowerpots across the eastern half of the continent, a full-grown adult barely longer than your hand. It is gentle to the point of being defenseless. The catch is the food: no rodents, ever. If you are not willing to keep a steady supply of earthworms and slugs, keep something else.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Ambient temp	70–78 °F, 65–70 °F night
Basking spot	80–84 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	Low UVB beneficial
Diet	Slugs, earthworms, snails
Feeding cadence	Every 3–5 days
Adult size	9–13 inches
Lifespan	7–10 years



Captive-bred DeKay's brown snakes turn up on the natives tables at NARBC shows, small enough that most of the crowd walks right past.
Photo: Mila C. / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Gentle, Fragile, and Native

DeKay's brown snakes do not bite. Cornered, they flatten and musk, and that is the whole defense. That gentleness is not an invitation. At nine to thirteen inches they are built like a shoelace, and rough handling injures them. Keep sessions short and support the whole body. One more thing before you bring one home: collecting native reptiles is regulated, and the rules change from state to state. Buy captive-bred stock and check your own state's rules first.

02

Housing, Stage by Stage

Everything about this snake says floor space. Horizontal orientation at every stage, from a 10×8×8 for newborns up to 36×18×12 for a grown adult, with 24×18×12 the honest adult minimum. Racks are not suitable. A snake this small finds gaps you cannot see, so check the lid and the vents before the animal goes in. House one snake per enclosure. Feeding a group is a scramble; the smaller animal loses every time, and you will not spot the loser until it is dangerously thin.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Newborn	10×8×8	12×8×8	Born live, not hatched. Tiny neonates take chopped worm and small slugs.
Juvenile	12×8×8	18×12×12	Vermivorous and insectivorous; will not take rodents at any size.
Subadult	18×12×12	24×18×12	Nearly adult size already; space needs stay modest, floor over height.
Adult	24×18×12	36×18×12	9–13 inches full grown. Horizontal floor space beats height; no racks.

Inches, from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Horizontal floor space is the priority at every stage; racks are not suitable for this species.

03

Heat & Light

This is a temperate animal and the numbers are modest. Ambient 70–78 °F, a small warm spot at 80–84 °F, and a night drop to 65–70 °F that you should allow rather than fight. Overhead heat on a thermostat, always. Heat rocks are never an option, and an animal this small has no margin for a hot surface. Low UVB is not required but it is beneficial, so run a low-output lamp over part of the enclosure and leave the rest shaded.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold humidity at 50–70%. That range is easy to reach and easy to overshoot, and a soaked enclosure with no airflow is how small snakes get scale rot. Mist one end, keep the other dry, and let the animal choose. A shallow water dish it cannot tip goes in from day one and gets changed daily. A damp hide packed with sphagnum earns its keep at shed time, and it keeps offered slugs from shriveling before they are found.

05

Substrate and Cover

Brown snakes live their lives under things. Give them a thick, moist bed of topsoil and coco fiber topped with leaf litter, deep enough to tunnel through, and cover the surface with cork flats, bark slabs, and a clean board. Loose sand is wrong for this species at every age. The enrichment is the substrate itself. A snake that can push, tunnel, and vanish under cover is one you will rarely see, and that is exactly right.

06

Feeding: Slugs and Worms

This snake eats slugs, earthworms, and snails, and it will starve beside a thawed pinky rather than take one.

Plan the food before you plan the enclosure. Feed every 3–5 days, cut to a size the snake can manage. Source matters as much as species. Never collect invertebrates from ground that has seen slug pellets, pesticide, or lawn treatment. Cultured earthworms are the safe supply, and a small worm bin makes the hobby easier.

07

Health Red Flags

An animal this small has no fat reserve to coast on. A brown snake that refuses worms for several feedings, goes slack-sided, or shows wrinkled, tented skin is starving or dehydrating, and days matter here, not weeks. Watch also for stuck shed on the eyes and tail tip, gaping, or wheezing, which usually means the setup is too cool and too wet. Any of it is a reptile-vet visit; bring a fecal sample, because wild-sourced prey brings parasites.

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.