

Care of Pet Snakes

This information is designed as a method of communication between veterinarians and clients who care for pet snakes. The information provided is for general care of all snakes; however, each individual species has specific needs. If you have any questions, be sure to ask your veterinarian

Introduction

Even though they are still loathed by a large percentage of the population, snakes have recently become very popular pets. In fact, some estimates now place the number of pet snakes in the U.S. at around one half million, and increasing extremely rapidly. The reasons for their popularity abound, since the majority are docile, quiet, long-lived and easy-to-handle animals, and in some cases are brilliantly colored and very attractive. The four most popular pet snakes are pythons, boas, king snakes and rat snakes.

There are nearly 2800 different kinds of snakes and no one information sheet can summarize all of the requirements of every species. One must make every effort to research the species in question in order to determine its specific requirements in captivity; however, there are a number of "basic requirements" common to all captive snakes if they are to stay healthy and breed. These include: correct size cage constructed of the proper material, correct substrate, a place to hide, a water source, heat sources and thermal gradients within the cage, proper humidity, and diet. In addition, frequent cleaning and disinfection are essential for successful long-term maintenance. The presence of water in a cage with poor ventilation may be detrimental to some snakes, particularly to those from very dry climates; therefore, good ventilation is essential.

Veterinary care has also become an integral part of successful snake maintenance and breeding. Your veterinarian can examine your snake and monitor its health through regular fecal exams, culture and/or blood work. Given the proper care, some snakes can live nearly 30 years in captivity.

Caging

Snakes are best housed indoors in smooth-sided, well-ventilated enclosures as long, or longer than, the snake and about half as wide. Glass, plexiglass, and plastic are all smooth, non-porous, easily disinfected materials suitable for cage construction. Glass aquariums