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9098 LAGUNA MAIN STREET, SUITE 5

ELK GROVE, CALIFORNIA 95758

PHONE: (916) 691-7387

## General care and maintenance of colubrid snakes

This care sheet is written as a set of general guidelines for the care and maintenance of colubrid snakes. Each colubrid species may have slightly different needs. Please ask the staff of Pets To Go and Upscale Reptiles to clarify any questions or concerns you may have.

### Colubrid:

Colubrid snakes include the following types: corn snake, milk snake, king snake, rat snake (many types) and gopher snake. Boas and pythons are not colubrids. This care sheet does not include requirements for boas and pythons

### General Information:

Colubrid snakes are great “starter” reptiles. Their basic care is straightforward. This group of reptiles tends to be docile and easily handled. By following the requirements below, you should expect to have a healthy pet for the next 12 to 15 years.

### Cage Requirements:

Most colubrid snakes will do very well in a **20-gallon (long)** terrarium for life. Larger species may require a **40-gallon terrarium**. Although hatchling colubrids can be safely housed in a **10-gallon** enclosure, we recommend establishing the larger enclosure in the beginning. This will save you from having to buy the larger enclosure when your hatchling becomes an adult.

### Cage Substrate and Decorations:

The substrate you choose for your new snake will depend on the reptile. Some colubrids require greater humidity while others prefer a desert environment. Ask the staff of Pets To Go which substrate is best for your snake.

When choosing decorations for your snake, remember that snakes like to hide. It is important to offer them hiding places on both the cool and warm portions of the enclosure. Doing this allows the snake to decide where it wants to be based on its temperature needs and not on lack of hiding places. **Half logs, driftwood** and **plastic plants** make good hides.

### Heating Requirements:

Reptiles are cold blooded. Because of this, colubrid snakes require that heating elements be added to their enclosure to ensure that they can “warm up” when needed. Proper heat is required to ensure that your reptile can properly digest meals, and synthesize the minerals needed for a long life. Failure to heat your reptile can cause your pet to regurgitate its meals, act very sluggish or may ultimately cost the life of your reptile.

Most colubrids require a temperature range from 85-90 degrees on the warm side of the enclosure, and room temperature of 75 degrees on the cool side. This temperature gradient can be established with the use of an **under tank heater** and an overhead heat lamp. Both heating devices are placed on the same side of the enclosure allowing the warm side of the terrarium to reach the 85-90 degree level. The other half of the enclosure is not heated, thus remaining at room temperature. The temperature of your enclosure can be measured with **thermometers** available in the store.

**Feeding Requirements:**

Most colubrids sold at Pets To Go are eating **defrosted frozen mice**. The staff of Pets To Go and Upscale Reptiles will let you know the proper size frozen mouse to feed your snake. We urge you to continue feeding defrosted frozen mice to your new snake. The most frequent injury we see in snakes is caused by a bite inflicted by the prey item. Most bites end up infected and require veterinary care. You can avoid this hazard by maintaining your snake on a defrosted, frozen mouse diet. Your new pet does not need to kill its own food to be happy.

We highly recommend that you feed your snake outside of the enclosure in which it lives. By feeding outside the terrarium, you minimize the snakes feeding response when you reach into the terrarium. This means that you are less likely to be mistaken as food by your snake. Plastic sweater boxes with air holes drilled into them make a great feeding place. Once your frozen mouse is defrosted, place it in the feeding box. Remove the snake from its enclosure, and place the snake in the feeding box. Secure the lid on the box, and allow your snake to eat. When your snake has finished eating, remove it from the box and place it back inside its terrarium. Should your snake not eat the mouse, do not re-freeze the mouse.

**Water Requirements:**

All colubrids require fresh water. The size of the **water bowl** you need for your colubrid will depend on the type of snake purchased. Some colubrids prefer to soak in water on a regular basis, while others do not. Please ask the staff of Pets To Go and Upscale Reptiles about your snakes water requirements.

The water in the water bowl should be kept clean and full at all times. Water that is allowed to sit may harbor bacteria and could harm the snake. If your snake defecates in the water bowl, change the water immediately. In all other circumstances change the water at least every other day.

**Shedding:**

All snakes shed their skin. The frequency with which your snake will shed depends on its age. Hatchling snakes shed much more frequently than adults. You can expect baby snake to shed about every few weeks, while adults may only shed 4 times in a year.

The shed cycle in most colubrids lasts about 2 weeks. It starts with a dulling of the normal color. You may not notice this slight change the first few times your snake sheds, but the longer you have it, the better you will get at noticing this slight change. About one week after the initial dulling of the skin, you will notice that your snake's eyes have gone opaque in color. This is normal, and is caused by air entering the space between the old eye scale (eye cap) and the new eye scale. The opaque color will clear within 3 days, and within a week of the eyes clearing your snake will begin to shed.

A perfect shed will come off your snake in 1 piece. The shed will include the head, the 2 eye scales and the body including the tip of the tail. It is very important that the entire body of your snake sheds. Pieces of shed left on the snake will dry out and may cause serious injury to your snake. Should pieces of shed remain on your snake 24 hours after it has started to shed, we recommend soaking your snake for 15-20 minutes in 1" of 80-degree water. Doing this will help the rest of the shed come off the body. If soaking does not help, please contact the store as soon as possible so that we can assist you in removing the shed from the snake. It is vital that the entire shed be removed from the snake.

Do not be surprised if your snake seems disinterested in food while in a shed cycle. We recommend that you do not feed your snake while it is in a shed cycle. Allow the snake to shed, then return to your regular feeding schedule.