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Caring for your rat snake

Rat snakes belong to the genus Elaphe. This genus contains a large variety of beautiful and interesting snakes. A few of the snakes belonging to the rat snake family include the corn snake, fox snake and the red-tail green rat snake. Each rat snake can vary in size, eating habits and color, but the general care requirements are basically the same.

Rat snakes and other reptiles are cold-blooded which means that they must obtain heat from other sources to stay healthy. This heat helps with digestion, the production of energy to feed and move about and also helps keep your reptile healthy and happy. Your new snake will also need proper enclosure requirements, food, vitamins, lighting and water. Each of these requirements will be explained.

Because your new pet is cold-blooded you will need to provide it with a heat source. Suggested heat sources include an undertank heater and/or a heat light. To maintain health, rat snakes must be kept at 75-85 degrees Fahrenheit, the higher temperature being necessary to digest food. Temperatures can drop into the lower range at night. If a heat light is needed to increase or maintain heat within the enclosure it is important to provide a normal photoperiod. A normal photoperiod means approximately 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness. To monitor the temperature within the enclosure it is important to have a high range thermometer. Another important thing to remember is that your new snake is safe from thermal burns, this is why we recommend NEVER to use a hot rock as a heat source, they fluctuate too much, and too many reptiles have suffered severe burns from these heat sources.

Setting up your rat snakes new home is not only important but also fun. A rat snake must be housed in at least a 20-gallon terrarium, preferably with a slide top screen lid. The slide top screen lid will provide ventilation and an escape proof lid. The fun part of designing your new pets enclosure is that it's up to you how you want it to look. One thing to remember when designing a home for a new reptile is where did it live before it was bred in captivity? For example, does your new snake like to climb or does it prefer to burrow? Once you have this information the rest is up to you.

The majority of rat snakes are carnivorous. A carnivorous reptile is one, which eats other reptiles or mammals. Occasionally a rat snake in the wild may eat insects or birds but the majority of captive-bred rat snakes will eat mice and rats. Mice and rats as a food source are not only healthy but also easily accessible. Rodents can be purchased both live and frozen. We recommend continuing your snake on frozen mice or rats, as it's main food source. Frozen food is safe and can be purchased in quantity. Furthermore there is no risk of your new snake receiving a nasty bite from a live mouse or rat. How often do you need to feed your new reptile? An active snake will happily eat every 7 to 10 days or so.

Rats and mice are an excellent source of nutrients but because the variation of diet is not available in captivity it is important that your new snake is taking vitamins. Reptile vitamins for snakes are available in powder form. Powdered vitamins make it easy for you to place a directed amount of vitamins on the mouse or rat. Vitamins will help with the continued well being of your snake.

As mentioned previously a photoperiod is important to keep your snake healthy. Not only does a snake need heat, food and vitamins but it also needs a natural day period and an evening period. In a variety of rat snake species daylight is required to digest and absorb vitamins from their diet. If this daylight is not provided the vitamins you have been give your snake will not be used. It is important to provide your snake with a day bulb containing UVA and/or UVB so it may absorb the entire nutrients from its diet.

The last necessity for your new snake is a water bowl. The water bowl must be large enough for the snake to climb into. Snakes enjoy soaking in a water bowl to keep cool if it gets to warm in it's new home and they also soak to help keep their skin moist so the shedding process is easy and quick.

If you have any further questions concerning the care of your ratsnake, please call us at Pets To Go (916) 691-7387.