**Corn Snake Care Sheet**

**Enclosure** Corns must be housed in at least a 20 gallon tank for a single snake. If you have 2-4 snakes a 55 gallon would be best. More snakes = bigger tank. The tank must have a secure top. A determined snake can push against screen or glass until it finds an opening big enough for its head; where its head goes, so goes its body. Some snakes will constantly rub their nose against the screened top of the tank in an effort to find a way out. The resulting abrasions should be treated with an antiseptic and antibiotic ointment. The furnishings in the enclosure should then be evaluated to provide a more natural environment.

**Provide a Hiding Place** A hide box of some sort should be provided, and an interesting branch for climbing and resting. Branches collected from the wild will need to be debugged by soaking first in chlorine/water solution, then rinsed thoroughly, soaked in clean water, then left to dry in the sun. No special lighting is required.

**Substrate** Pine shavings (Aspen is best - not cedar, which is toxic) works well. The snakes will often burrow under the shavings so don't be surprised if they are not always in view. If you use pine or aspen shavings the urine and feces can be scooped out with a cat litter scoop, with fresh shavings added as needed. Be sure to remove soiled substrate as soon as possible; urine-soaked material can become a breeding ground for bacteria and fungus. If using undertank heat pads, be sure to pressure fit cardboard under the shavings so the snake cannot burrow and burn themselves on the hot glass.

**Temperature** An undertank heat pad is placed under one-half of the tank; this leaves one side cooler so that your snake can regulate its body temperature as needed. A heating pad made for people can be purchased at any drug store; set it at medium or low depending upon the ambient air temperature. To maintain health, corn snakes must be kept at 75-85 F, the higher temperature being necessary to digest its food. Temperatures can fall to 70 F at night. To easily monitor temperature, inexpensive aquarium self-stick thermometers can be purchased and applied about an inch above the bottom of the tank on the warm side.

Hot rocks should never be used; they fluctuate too much, and too many reptiles suffer severe ventral burns.

An incandescent light bulb in a reflector shield may be set just outside the tank to heat up a basking area; appliance timers can be set to turn the light on and off at set times during the day. Reset the hours of operation to adjust for seasonal fluctuations in ambient air temperature.

**Feeding** An active snake will happily eat every 21 days or so. They will eat, and should only be fed, killed prey. A snake who is not hungry when live prey is introduced into the enclosure often finds itself becoming the meal, especially if the prey is a rat.

To economize, you can buy in bulk and freeze them. Most pet stores now offer frozen mice. Remove the prey item from the freezer and allow it to defrost at room temperature. When defrosted, place rodent in a paper grocery bag, plastic tub, or cardboard box. Remove snake from enclosure and place it in the container with the food. Make sure to secure the container with a locking lid, clip for the bag, or heavy object on top of the box. Removing the snake from it’s enclosure to feed, makes the snake a safer pet for you to handle. If you feed the snake inside it’s home, it will learn that food comes from above and may accidentally strike at you when you reach in to hold it. By feeding it elsewhere, the snake learns that the bag or box means feeding time, and the home never has food. This will allow you to reach in freely and be safe.

Start hatchlings off with pinkie mice. Hatchlings need to eat more often then adult snakes. They should eat pinkie mice every one to two weeks. As your snake grows, gradually increase the prey size by offering fuzzies, hoppers, then small adult mice or rat pinkies. A full-grown Corn snake can eat a medium to large mouse. If you feed too much at one feeding session, or feed a prey item that is too large, your snake may regurgitate it. This will risk the longevity of your snake.

**Water** A bowl of fresh water must be available at all times. It will be used for drinking and sometimes for bathing. If the snake defecates in it, the bowl must be cleaned and disinfected immediately.

**Handling** Corns do not wrap snugly around your arm like ball pythons or king snakes. They tend to pick a direction and go for it. Though they are relatively small in body mass, they are quite strong. Always support the body and give free rein to the head. If the head starts going somewhere you don't want it to go, gently guide it into another direction. Many snakes are nervous when introduced into a new situation with new people. Give them a couple of days to settle down before letting new people handle them.

**Shedding** As a reptile grows, its old skin become too tight and worn. A new skin is made just below the old. As a snake gets ready to shed, its eyes will turn a milky blue over the course of several days, and the body color will start to dull and develop a whitish sheen. It is very important at this time to have a water bowl large enough to soak it’s whole body. There should be a rough piece of wood or rock in the enclosure for the snake to rub itself out of it’s shed.

**Veterinary Care** All newly acquired reptiles should have fecal exams done by an experienced reptile vet to check for bacteria, protozoa and worms. Left untreated, these infestations can ultimately kill your reptile. Medications are available to treat these conditions. When your snake first defecates, collect the feces in a clean plastic bag, seal it, label it with your name, phone number, date and your snake's name, then take it and your snake to a [reptile vet](http://www.anapsid.org/vets/index.html).

**Signs of ill-health** Snakes, like all other animals, do get sick. Listlessness, failure to eat over several weeks or regurgitating meals can be signs of bacterial or internal parasite infections. Take these animals to a reptile vet, with a fecal or vomitus sample enclosed in a ziplock bag. External parasites, such as ticks and mites, must also be dealt with. With proper instruction, this is something you can do yourself if the infestation is mild. Allowed to escalate, ectoparasites can kill their host. If the skin around the neck forms wrinkles and puckers, the snake is severely dehydrated and you must see a vet. The vet will either administer subcutaneous fluids or show you how to force fluids. Animals cannot digest food when dehydrated, so emaciation will set in if the condition is allowed to continue untreated. Thin, stringy mucous coming out of nose or mouth or snakes seen gasping or yawning frequently can be signs of upper respiratory infections. Changes in feces or urates (pee) - (different color, consistency, frequency) , can signal a disease or infection. Observe your snake every day to be sure to catch any problems early. Treat the problem as soon as it is noticed to prevent other health problems and vet bills.

**Questions** If you have questions or concerns regarding your snake, Please do not hesitate to call at any time. We have worked hard to rescue these critters and want to know they are living good, healthy lives. We do not mind giving advice or help whenever we can. If at anytime you are no longer able to care for your pet, we ask that you please contact us and let us know. We can help you find a new good home, or if necessary take them back until a home can be found.

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