Super Simple Snakes:

This is a basic information sheet regarding snakes in general. Please do your research for the particular species you are interested in. Snakes are all made up basically the same. They eat whole prey items, require water, heat, and a place to hide. This sheet will provide the basic information for the snakes commonly found in the pet trade.

Habitat: Snakes come in many different sizes. The habitat you provide should allow the snake to stretch its body out to its full length. There should be plenty of room for the snake to move around and explore. The habitat can be glass or wood, or even a plastic tub as long as it is big enough, has ventilation, and a secure locking lid. Snakes can use the wall to extend their bodies to their full length and grab on with their heads, pull up and push out the top.

Substrate: The tank floor will vary from species to species. There are snakes that like to be exposed and would prefer flat substrates like reptile carpet, or paper grocery bags. Some snakes prefer to burrow so make sure to research your snakes species needs. For burrowing snakes Aspen shavings should be used. Cedar is extremely toxic to animals, pine can cause some problems, but aspen is fine. Sand and dirt have too many risks and should be avoided.

Heat: Most snakes will be fine with a heat pad stuck to the side of the tank, or a low grade heat lamp, or ceramic heat emitter (produces heat with no light) on the top. Do not place heat pads under the tank because the snake can lay on it for too long and burn themselves. With the heat against the side or from the top they will lay near the heat not completely on it.

Water: Water is very important for snakes. They need water to stay hydrated, and to help them get ready to shed their skin as they grow. A snake should have a dish of water big enough for them to get their whole body into it at all times. Make sure the bowl is only half full so it won’t overflow when the snake gets in.

Light: There are no specific light requirements for snakes. Some people like to put regular light bulbs on during the day to simulate a day and night schedule for the snake. The snake will be fine either way.

Furnishings: Snakes need someplace to hide, so a cave is appreciated by most snakes. They also need stimulation, so branches and plants are good things to add to the habitat.

Food: Snakes eat whole prey animals. Most snakes eat rodents, but some eat lizards, birds, and other things, so do your research. The safest way to feed snakes is to provide them with pre-killed food. In the wild snakes sneak up on their prey and grab it from behind. The animal struggles to get free and it is usually over before the snake gets hurt. In captivity, the food animal hits the wall and turns to face off with the snake in order to protect itself. Snakes can end up hurt even fatally. We highly recommend not feeding live food to your snake. Snakes that do not have to fight for their meals are less likely to bite on accident when someone reaches in to pick them up.

Feeding Frequency: This is a highly debated topic. There are many feeding methods and schedules that work. We will simply share what we know from a medical and rescue standpoint. Snakes that are still growing can be fed once every two weeks. Once a snake has reached an adult size, the feeding should be reduced to every 3-4 weeks. When a snake finishes digesting it’s food, the digestive system actually atrophies. When a snake is ready to eat again, it’s body releases enzymes that re-animate the organs allowing it to eat and digest again. It is important for the snakes body to complete its cycle. Snakes fed too often are more likely to develop tumors, have kidney issues, and have shorter life spans.

Shedding: Snakes shed their skin as they grow. This usually occurs shortly after they eat. This can be a hard time for snakes. They prefer to be handled less at this time. Water dishes and hiding places are extra important at this time. A good thing to do to help the snake to have a healthy shed is to provide a moist box. A disposable Tupper-ware container with the lid on and a hole cut in the side can be placed inside the habitat. Put a slightly damp washcloth in the bottom of the container and leave it until they shed. This will allow the snake to control it’s humidity and shed properly.

Please feel free to reach out to Creepy Critters Rescue at any time to ask questions that were not answered here.