



# Ball Python Care Guide





So you just  
brought home  
a new snake...  
now what?

## About ball pythons

*python regius*



One of the most popular pet snakes, ball pythons come from the tropical region of sub-saharan Africa. They are mostly terrestrial and spend much of their time, when not hunting, living underground in termite mounds or rodent burrows. Because of this natural behavior, our goal as keepers is to recreate this environment to the best of our abilities, making them comfortable and unstressed.

## The first week

As tempting as it is to want to play and bond with your new snake, it has gone through a very stressful time in shipment and being introduced to a new home. Let it acclimate for a week before attempting to do any handling or feeding.

It's also a good idea to keep your snake on paper towel bedding at first to closely monitor its health, bowel movements, and be able to identify any issues like mites.

## Basic Husbandry Parameters

**Temperature Gradient:** To allow cold blooded animals to regulate their body temperature, we want to provide a range of temperatures in the enclosure. Aim for 80° on the cool side, and 88°-90° surface temperature on the warm side. The air temperature should not drop below 75°. This is best accomplished with under-tank heating like a heat mat or heat tape, or a ceramic heat emitter

(CHE) above the enclosure. (Note: this is not a basking bulb. Ball pythons don't require light and it may actually stress them). All heating elements should be controlled by a thermostat, and temperature checked by a temperature gun - the temperature of the heating pad will not be the same as in the enclosure. You may have to set your thermostat higher in order to reach proper enclosure temperatures.

**Humidity:** 60% - unless you already live in a humid region, we recommend using cypress mulch or reptichip. This will hold moisture well without molding. We *do not* recommend aspen bedding for ball pythons. If you need to lower humidity, go with paper towel instead. Humidity can be raised higher when you notice your snake going into shed.

**Enclosure size:** Though it may seem counter-intuitive, bigger is not better! To properly replicate their underground homes, a smaller enclosure will make them feel more secure, and you will have more success getting them to eat. A wide open enclosure will make this secluded animal feel vulnerable and will likely make them defensive and impact their desire to eat.

## Enclosure Size Guide:

Ball python weight	Enclosure size
Hatchling-300g	6qt tub/5.5 gallon tank
300g-700g	15qt/10 gallon
700g-1800g	28-32qt/20 gallon long/2'x2' enclosure
1800g+	41qt/40 gallon breeder/3'x2' enclosure

## The Perfect Setup

There are several different setups that will work well for a ball python, though some are cheaper to set up or easier to maintain husbandry parameters.

**There are a few things you will need no matter the setup:** a **heat source** (heat tape/mat, ceramic heat emitter, or radiant heat panel depending on setup), a **thermostat** (we like Herpstat brand!), a **thermometer** for measuring ambient temperatures (Acurite brand works well), a **temperature gun**, **2 hides** (for each side of the enclosure), and a **water dish**.

Some setups will require "clutter" in the enclosure to help your snake feel more secure. You can add things like fake plants and rocks to fill empty space. With both rack and tub setups, use a soldering iron to melt a few holes on each side for ventilation. Sand holes from the inside to remove any sharp edges.

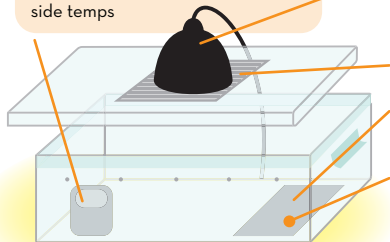
## Single Sterilite tub

**Pros:** cheap to set up, doesn't take up much space, keeps humidity well, can get in any home goods store, easy to size up when your snake grows, less clutter needed, easy to clean

**Cons:** Not good for viewing your snake, room temperature can't drop below 75°

## Single Sterilite tub

digital thermostat to monitor cool side temps



(optional) ceramic heat emitter (CHE) with a dimmer, if you struggle with maintaining temperatures and square cut-out with metal mesh to put CHE on

heat mat, connected to thermostat

thermostat probe placed between heat mat and tub

## Rack

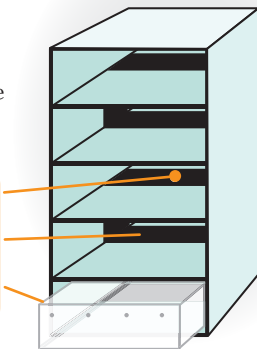
**Pros:** saves space when you have multiple snakes, keeps heat (if the rack has closed sides) and humidity well, no clutter needed, easy to clean

**Cons:** Will have to order online, not good for viewing your snake, room temperature can't drop below 70°

thermostat probe placed on middle rack

heat tape, connected to thermostat

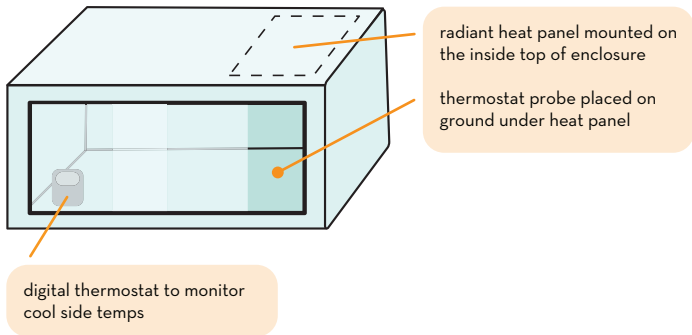
plastic tub, with holes for ventilation (use a soldering iron)



## PVC enclosure

**Pros:** Great for viewing, holds heat and humidity well without any modifications

**Cons:** More expensive than other options, have to order online, takes up a lot of space per animal, requires additional clutter/decorations to make your ball python feel secure.

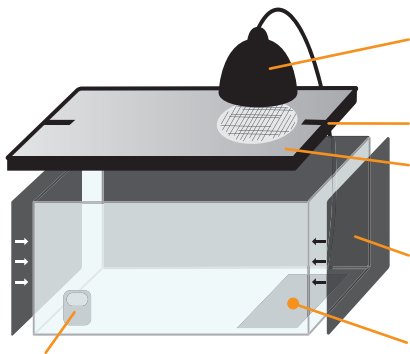


## Glass aquarium

**Pros:** Good for viewing, available in most pet stores

**Cons:** Doesn't hold heat or humidity well without modifications, vertical space is wasted, requires additional clutter/decorations to make your ball python feel secure, more difficult to clean

## Glass aquarium



digital thermostat to monitor cool side temps

ceramic heat emitter (CHE) with dimmer + *optional* heat mat

screen lid with locks/clamps

HVAC aluminum tape covering screen (except where dome sits) to hold in humidity

black foam board/decorative vinyl backing on 3 sides to provide security

thermostat probe placed between heat mat and tub, or on ground under CHE

## Setup Tips



For PVC and glass aquarium enclosures, you'll want to use at least an inch of damp substrate to keep humidity up



Stay away from stick-on thermo-hygrometers that can easily detach and stick to your snake



One hide should be placed on each end of the tank



Regularly check cool and warm side temperatures with a temperature gun to make sure thermostats are working properly



## Feeding

You'll want to feed your snake one appropriately-sized meal once a week. The food should be a little larger than the widest part of your snake, and leave a slight lump. Feed your snake in the enclosure, and avoid handling 48 hours afterward, or they may regurgitate.

1. Place frozen rat/mouse in a plastic bag and thaw in a bowl of warm water (placing it directly in the water may wash off the smell and make your snake less likely to eat).
2. Once fully thawed and warm to the touch, warm the head with a hair dryer for a few seconds to help with the feeding response.
3. Offer food with tongs

## Feeder Size Guide:

Feeder Type/Size	Ball Python Weight	
	Male	Female
rat fuzzy (10-19g) or small mouse (12-17g)	<200g	<200g
rat pup (20-29g) or adult mouse (18-32g)	200-350g	200-350g
weaned rat (30-49g) or jumbo mouse (33-50g)	350-500g	350-500g
small rat (50-89g)	>500g	500-1000g
medium rat (90-179g)	<i>Not necessary for typical adult males</i>	>1000g