

Exotic and Domestic Pets

A Calming Influence in a Stressful Life...

Owen Jones



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by

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Caring for a Pet Snake

Pet snakes are definitely not for the typical pet-lover, just as snakes are not for most people, as they have an irrational fear of them. If you usually think of cats and dogs when you think of pets, you really must think long and hard before buying a pet snake as much for the sake of the snake as for your own.

Having said that, if you are really interested in snakes - and why not? - they make very interesting pets, even if they cannot be taken for a walk or cuddled like a cat or a dog. Some snake-owners do say that they feel some affection for and from their pet snakes though, surprising as that may seem to most people.

The main point is, if you have not had a snake before, not to take the decision lightly because they are a lot of work on a regular basis although this is not daily as with cats and dogs. They are more like a half-way house between tropical fish and furry, cuddly Western pets.

Once you have taken the decision to have a pet snake, you need to think even harder about which species you should buy, because some are dangerous, some have greater needs than others and some grow pretty large. The Reticulated Python of Thailand can grow to 10 metres! That is 33 feet and at that size, very, very few animals, including humans are safe from it if it is hungry.

Feeding snakes puts a lot of people off because they are all carnivores, some prefer fish, but they all eat meat of some sort. One general mistake that people make though, is that they think that snakes eat live mice and rats. They don't. They either poison or crush them to death first, so you will not have to give your pet snake live prey, although we do not know, of course, whether the snake misses killing its own food.

Most pet shops that stock snakes breed mice and kill them before feeding them to their snakes or some buy frozen mice for the purpose. Snakes are very effective killers, but sometimes its prey might get a lucky bit in and injure the snake which may cost you a lot of money in veterinarian bills.

The good part of feeding a snake is that most shouldn't be fed more often than once a week and some can go for several weeks between

feedings. The reason is that they don't have to expend any energy creating their own body heat. In fact, if the cage is not warm enough, a snake can't even digest its food. Luckily for us though, pet snakes rarely need feeding more than once a week.

The vivarium, enclosure, or cage for the snake needs to be escape proof above all else because snakes are supreme escape artists, and don't need a very big opening to find a way out. The vivarium also has to have a source of heat, because snakes are cold blooded creatures and so need to be able to use their environment to regulate their temperature.

Most people do not know, but snakes must have a variety of temperatures to choose from. Sometimes they like to bask in the heat and other times they prefer it cooler, but this should not be up to you, the owner. The snake knows what it needs. Therefore, for best results, the enclosure should be heated on one side only but thermometers placed at both ends.

Each snake species has specific needs in terms of heat, and you should find out these needs before getting a snake, but they need different temperatures in order to perform different bodily functions like digestion and sleeping.

Most snakes appreciate a bowl of water, a few places to hide and a floor covering. You can buy this, or you could just use grass, straw and leaves; newspaper works well for most species too. Newspaper is unsightly because it is unnatural, but it can easily be replaced when soiled. The water should be kept clean, too. Any faeces or uneaten food should be removed quickly and the vivarium must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected about once a month.

Keeping a pet snake is a big responsibility, but it can also be an adventure. If you are a beginner, you should start with one of the easier snakes to keep. Do a lot of research and talk to snake-owners and you will find out that pet snake breeds are generally rated according to how hard they are to keep. In time, you will learn the ways of keeping pet snakes. After a long while you may feel confident enough to expand your collection to include some of the more exotic, harder to look after species.

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