



## Ball Python

### Introduction

Python Regius otherwise known as Ball Python, is one of the most popular snakes you can purchase today. They are very hardy animals and if properly handled can tolerate handling. Being such a hardy animal, they are very forgiving of bad husbandry and can survive in poor husbandry for years. Remember, there's a difference between surviving and thriving; your goal should be to allow your Ball Python to thrive. P. Regius can live up to 30 years and grow up to 5ft long.

### Housing

Ball pythons are not nocturnal but rather crepuscular. This means they are mostly active during twilight. They are also terrestrial so providing extra space to roam is recommended. However, saying that, Ball Pythons will climb if given the opportunity. In the wild they can be found in grasslands, rainforest and savannas from the coast of Senegal to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A young Ball Python can be housed in a 20-gallon terrarium, as your snake grows you should upsize your terrarium. An adult should be housed in a 40-gallon being the minimum, a 4'x2'x2' enclosure is recommended. This allows your snake to fully stretch out (especially larger individuals), allows you to install lighting/heating equipment, climbing room, provide multiple hides and substrate (if you choose to use a substrate).

### Substrate

Your choice of substrate should allow you to elevate humidity levels and allow burrowing (P. Regius have been documented burrowing). Some options of substrate to achieve this are: Cypress mulch, coconut products, leaf litter, top soil, barks and mosses. Mixing different substrates can help as well, for example a mixture of topsoil, sand, moss and leaf litter 5-8in deep would allow you to meet humidity and burrowing requirements. Misting the substrate directly will help keep the humidity levels up. Do not over-mist as the substrate should not remain wet for long periods of time. Keeping your substrate too wet can lead to scale rot. If you choose not to use a substrate, some common alternatives are: paper towels, newspaper and reptile carpet. If you use any of these keep in mind you will need to keep your humidity levels up a different way. One common method is placing a water bowl under a heat source.

### Furnishings

Provide furnishings to accommodate for their crepuscular and terrestrial nature. Sturdy thick branches can be provided for enrichment and activity during nocturnal hours. Placing an above heat source under a branch (at a safe distance and with a guard if placed inside the enclosure) will give your Ball Python the opportunity to open bask which is very common. Provide at least 2 hides, one on the hot side and the other on the cool side; more than 2 hides are recommended but not necessary. Stacked rocks make a great hot hide when placed under an above heat source. Real and fake plants are a great way to fill in empty spots, cover hide entrances and give your set up a more natural look. Wandering Jews, Golden Pothos and ferns are great live plants to place on your cool side of the enclosure.

## Temperature

To achieve a thriving environment, you should always keep your temperatures as accurate as possible. These temperatures consist of: surface, basking, ambient, cool side, hot side and burrow temperatures. Your cool side (including cool side burrows) should remain near 26C (80F). During night time the whole enclosure can drop down to these levels as well. During the day your ambient temperature should be near 28-32C (82-89F). The basking temperatures should be near 35-40C (95-104F). Ball Pythons do not brumate so lowering temps during the winter is not a must. All heating equipment should be above your snake. UTH (under tank heaters) are not recommended, they become extremely hot and burrows should remain at a cooler temp than the outside world. If you do decide to use UTH, always plug it in to a thermostat to control the heat output. CHE (ceramic heat emitters) and RHP (radiant heat panels) are recommended for night heating and background heating during the day. Always use a digital thermostat to measure ambient temperature.

## Lighting - UVB, UVA, Heat

Providing full spectrum lighting is recommended during the day (12/12 hr light cycle) including UVB/A. Ball Pythons can see in the UVA spectrum and will encourage healthy behaviors such as healthy day time activity and enhance their coloration. Some other benefits are UV light has antimicrobial properties and will regulate vitamin D3. Tube bulbs are recommended rather than coil bulbs if providing UVB/A and should be changed every 6 months. Recommended UVB bulbs are: Arcadia T8 12% UV-B (D3+ Desert), Arcadia T5 6% UV-B (D3 Forest), Arcadia T5 7% UV-B (ShadeDweller Pro). Some recommended basking bulbs are: Par38 (wattage depends on enclosure size) Halogen Flood Light 40+ Beam Angle (DO NOT USE ANYTHING LESS THAN A 40+ BEAM ANGLE) and Chromalux Full Spectrum PAR38 Halogen.

## Water and Humidity

Always provide freshwater, some Ball Pythons will choose to soak so the water bowl should be sized for your snake. If using tap water, Reptisafe is recommended to treat water. Your cool side humidity levels should range from 60-70% and the hot side can drop as low as 50%. Hand misting or automatic misters can help achieve these levels. Substrates will play a big role in maintaining proper humidity levels. Avoid using humidifiers and foggers, if used improperly they can lead to illness.

## Feeding

Ball Pythons feed on mammals and birds exclusively. Rats, mice, chicks, and quail are suitable staple diets. A full-size meal should be as thick around as the snake's widest part. Obesity and overfeeding are very commonly seen with keeping Ball Pythons, adults should be fed on average every 6 weeks. Hatchlings can be fed weekly and duration will stretch with age. Live feedings are recommended for snakes refusing to eat F/T (frozen and thawed) prey. Adults can fast for several months so if your husbandry is correct and the snake is healthy, don't panic and force feed. When the snake becomes hungry you will notice a higher level of activity and hunting behavior.

