



Paws, Claws & Wings

Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals



First time snake owners:

As with any new pet, your snake should have a checkup and parasite flush done by a reptile veterinarian as soon as possible.

To discover the gender of a snake it is recommended to get a veterinarian specializing in reptiles to probe-sex it. If this is done by an inexperienced person irreparable damage can be done to the snake.

Ensure that you have done adequate research on the species of snake you have chosen and are fully capable to meet all of its care requirements.

The majority of pet snakes are obligate carnivores (have to eat meat to survive) so be prepared for feeding whole prey. It is recommended to feed dead prey as this is less cruel to the prey and also avoids the complications arising when a snake is bitten by its food. This is also easier for you as you can keep pre-killed, frozen prey in your freezer and just defrost it when needed.

As all snakes are exothermic (cold blooded) so it is essential to have a thermal gradient in their enclosures as they need to be able to move from a hotter to a cooler temperature to regulate their body functions. Ensure that your terrarium is kept at the correct temperature as if the environment is too cold your snake will get very sick.

If your snake is not very tame or nervous, it can be tamed down by frequent short gentle handling sessions. If the snake is waving its body in the air when handled it is stressed while if it is coiling around your hands it is relaxed.

What to look for in a healthy snake: firm, round body. Clear eyes that are not discharging (if the snake is about to shed the eyes may be a little milky). No signs of external parasites. Pink mouth. Clean vent. Not shivering.

Do not buy a wild caught snake as they are much more prone to disease, parasites and stress. Buying wild caught animals also promotes illegal reptile smuggling and is unnecessary as most pet snake species are bred in captivity and are readily available.

Snakes that I would recommend for first time owners are corn and king snakes as they grow to a fair size and have quite docile personalities. Avoid any larger constrictors (boa constrictors, Burmese pythons), snakes with very difficult requirements (tree boas, water snakes), and any venomous snakes.

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