

# Reticulated Python Caresheet

Reticulated pythons originate from Southeast Asia. Pythons are oviparous, which means eggs are produced, laying only a handful to hundreds of eggs depending on the species, incubation times of 65- 100 days. Python hatchlings are 18-24 inches long, Reticulated pythons can reach 33 feet in length, with most exceeding 20 ft. They can live up to 30 years, but most live between 15 and 20 years.

**Enclosure:** Quarantine any new pythons away from other animals for at least 1 month to minimize the risk of transmitting inclusion body disease, a virus affecting these species that is always fatal. Do not house with any other snakes (including members of the same species) to prevent exposure to new diseases and to minimize stress. Be sure to wash hands after and between handling snakes. As many predators in the wild attack snakes from above, enclosures with sliding glass fronts often work best. Enclosures should be very escape-proof. As they get larger, we often need to build specialized cages to accommodate their large size potential. Avoid building with wood products, as this makes potential mite, bacteria, virus, and fungus control more difficult. These pythons are semi arboreal, and like to have items to climb on. Make sure they are secure and do not collapse on the snake. Use a substrate of newspaper/butcher paper and/or puppy pads, avoid bark and similar substances, as snakes often eat them and this can cause intestinal impactions. Pine and cedar shavings should also be avoided as they contain substances which can be irritating to animals' skin, eyes and respiratory tract. The hide box is one of the most important parts of the cage. Boxes that can be thrown away and replaced, when the snake defecates and urinates (poops and pees), are helpful. The box should allow a tight fit for the snake, but also allow a way to get the snake out if needed. We strongly recommend fully enclosed hides with two exits such as a latching bin turned upside down for adults.

**Temperature:** A ceramic heat lamp, deep heat projector, or white basking light outside the cage can be used to provide heat (do not allow direct contact at all with the heat source) with a basking spot at 90- 95°F, and the rest of cage cooling down to a cool end of 75°F. At night, as they are mostly nocturnal, make sure lights are off and allow the cage to cool down to 75°F. Place digital thermometers on the floor of the cage where the snake is! A heat pad (No hot rocks) under (not in) the cage can provide an accessory heat source at night and during the day on melamine/PVC cages. Heat sources must be closely regulated by a thermostat to avoid overheating.

**Humidity:** Normal humidity levels of 50-70% are recommended but may be difficult to maintain with good airflow, in some regions, making soaking necessary. To up your humidity try shifting your water tub closer to the heat source until desired levels are achieved. A dark humidity box with sphagnum moss can be made but requires routine maintenance and upkeep to avoid drying out or bacterial or fungal growth. Shedding occurs as the snake increases in size, in adults usually twice a year. Usually the eyes will cloud over several days before the shed, and at this time an otherwise gentle snake can become aggressive due to decreased vision and likely

discomfort. Do not expect them to eat at this time. The shed should come off in one or two pieces. Problems occur in animals with low humidity. A common problem with this is retained eye caps. We do not recommend you try to remove them, as the corneas of the eyes are easily damaged this way. Please schedule an appointment with your veterinarian if this problem occurs. Soak twice daily as described below when your snake enters shed behavior. Always check the shed to make sure the eye caps and the end of the tail are with it. A large water bowl/tub big enough for their whole body to fit for drinking/bathing should be provided and changed daily.

**Lighting:** Do not use any colored lighting. White basking light or non light producing heat sources only. Although they are mostly nocturnal we recommend providing them with 12 hours of UVB lighting during the day to come out and bask in as they choose to. At night, make sure lights are off.

**Handling:** Excessive handling while they are new should be avoided. However, once snakes are consistently eating, they should be handled frequently during the first year of life so they become comfortable with handling. While properly handled pythons can be quite docile, these are potentially dangerous animals so we recommend the following ground rules for all owners:

1. Never handle if over 8 ft in length without another person being present(There should be an extra person for every 3 feet over 6 feet of snake.).
2. Never allow the snake to coil around the torso or neck.
3. Be especially careful during feeding time (don't smell like potential prey from handling food! This includes snake food AND human food).
4. Never allow the snake free roam of the house unsupervised.
5. Always house the snake in a securely locked, escape -proof enclosure accessible only by you.
6. Never allow children around the snake without careful supervision.
7. Always use a hook first when reaching into an enclosure or holding bin. –Do NOT crowd the animal!
8. Ask the Handler for permission to touch.
9. Stay away from the head. Do not pet the head!
10. Do not stand directly in front of the head.
11. Approach from below if you are in sight of the animal.

**Diet:** With a new snake, minimize handling until they have eaten several times. This is a major reason they will not accept food. Pre-killed rodents are the best way to offer food, as live prey can bite and severely wound snakes very quickly. No other diet supplementation is necessary. Make sure the size of the prey is reasonable for the size of the snake. Juveniles do well with half-grown mice and fuzzies, subadults do best with mice, and adults are fed rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, young pigs or goats (with the last 2 being for very large snakes); with the numbers dependent on the frequency of feeding. How much to feed depends on the situation, please speak with your veterinarian for your individual snake. Usually feeding every 5-7 days is recommended until they are a year old, then every 2-4 weeks for several years. When they are adults, they are often fed every other month. Snakes should not have loose skin or a triangular

appearance head-on (previous signs in a snake indicate need for immediate veterinary consultation). Obesity can become a problem, with skin rolls between the ribs visible. If your snake refuses to eat for 2 or more meals, call us for recommendations on encouraging eating, but don't panic. The following are some suggestions to try at home.

1. Correct husbandry problems
2. Feed freshly-killed prey
3. Offer freshly-killed different colored rodents (remember size them for your animal!)
4. Drop feeding: Place the freshly-killed food into the enclosure for them to find and leave the room unoccupied
5. Still having problems, schedule a consultation and an exam with your veterinarian

**Health care:** Snakes can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend a physical exam, CBC, chemistries, and fecal float every 6 months, and for the new python. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see a vet if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Common problems are obesity, anorexia, cancer, intestinal obstruction, constipation, stomatitis (mouth rot), incorrect husbandry, upper respiratory problems, pneumonia, and intestinal parasites. Remember with any disease processes, the sooner the vet sees the animal, the more successful we are at treating them!