



# WEIRD 'N' WONDERFUL

Pets and reptiles

## Introduction Guide To The Care Of

### Royal Pythons

**Scientific Name:** Python regius

**Life Span:** 20 - 30 years is average for a Royal Python in captivity, but it is not uncommon for them to reach 40 years with appropriate care.

**Size:** up to 5ft females grow bigger than males

**Appearance:** Royal Pythons are large bodied snakes, which come in a range of colour variations and morphs. Generally, normal Royals are earthy colours like brown, beige and black with gold and white markings. There are a wide variety of Royal Python morphs available both in the UK and abroad. Each morph is a genetic mutation of the common Royal Python, which is either naturally occurring or brought about and emphasized by selective breeding in captivity. Some breeders take years to develop certain morphs by breeding different mutations together to create new or super designer morphs. Understandably, the price you would pay for a special morph is much higher than what you would pay for a common Royal Python, but if you are prepared to pay the price, then you are more likely to gain your money back through your own breeding projects. Royal Python morphs have the same care needs as a common Royal Python, so the cost of keeping a morph or a normal are the same, it is just the initial purchase price that is extravagant.

**Temperament and Handling:** They have a very docile temperament, as they are more likely to curl up in a ball to protect themselves than strike at a potential threat. They are easy and safe to handle, despite their size, and make a good choice for people who are new to snake keeping. Royal Pythons are quite a timid species and some do not appreciate being handled for long periods of time. Regular handling is still important though, to allow your snake to get used to human contact and to exercise outside of the vivarium. Although Royal Pythons do grow quite large, they are relatively easy to handle. They are slow moving compared to other types of pet snake, but are quite clumsy so should be handled with care. A fall from a height could injure your snake, so take care to support your Royal Python's body during handling.



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**Housing:** Royal Pythons are not highly active and do not need huge enclosures. A medium sized vivarium (Even a fish tank with a tight fitting lid) will house your Royal nicely. The vivarium should allow a minimum of 1 square foot of floor space to each foot of snake and be approximately a third of the snake's length in height. Hatchlings should start out in an appropriately sized small vivarium as they can become stressed and stop feeding in an oversized vivarium. All Snakes are excellent escape artists, so care must be taken when planning their housing. Make sure your vivarium or tank has a tight fitting lid, which can be clamped down. Royal Pythons are very strong and can push a loose fitting lid from a vivarium. Royal Pythons may grow up to 5ft in length, but do not necessarily need a large vivarium. They will feel more secure in a suitably sized vivarium, which should be around 3ft(L)x2ft(W)x2ft(H) for an adult, dependant on how big your Royal Python grows. All Royal Pythons need somewhere to hide and may become stressed if this is not provided. This could be a cardboard box, which can be easily replaced if it becomes soiled. Specialist reptile hides can be purchased from pet shops and over the Internet; these can be cleaned when you clean the rest of the vivarium once a month. Any hide should be just large enough for your Royal Python to curl up in; if it is too large the snake will not feel as secure. In general, it is wise to place two hides in your vivarium for your Royal to use, one in the warm side of the vivarium and one in the cooler side. This enables your snake to have adequate hiding places along the temperature gradient, which would allow your snake to adjust its body temperature. This is important, because for Royal Pythons, the instinct to hide is often more insistent than the instinct to keep at the right temperature. If the snake does not control his body temperature it can lead to many problems, the least of which being digestive problems. Branches and plastic plants can be bought from pet shops and over the internet these provide a place for climbing and resting, they also aid the snake when shedding its skin. Branches collected from the wild will need to be debugged by soaking first in chlorine/water solution, then rinsed thoroughly, soaked in clean water, then left to dry in the sun. Some live plants may be harmful to your Python, if in doubt don't use them in your vivarium. Repti-vine is widely available and may also be appreciated by your Royal Python. This is safe to use, easy to clean and comes in a range of thicknesses to ensure that it is stable enough for your Royal Python to climb upon. Royal Pythons are very inquisitive animals and like to explore new surroundings. Once in a while change the layout of the vivarium; this will keep your Royal from becoming bored. You will notice once you put your snake back in the tank it will start to re-explore its new surroundings. All Royal Pythons need fresh water to drink daily. Water should be given in a reasonable sized bowl which is fairly heavy to stop your snake tipping it over. Water can also help your snake during shedding at this time your snake may be found trying to bath in the water. If the snake defecates in its water bowl, the bowl must be cleaned and disinfected immediately.

**Heating and Lighting:** Royal Pythons are cold blooded and get heat from their surroundings. In the wild snakes bask in the sun to keep warm or move to a shady spot if they are too hot, this is called thermo-regulation. The ideal temperature for you snake's vivarium is a temperature gradient of 26-33°C (80-91°F). Royal Pythons are large bodied snakes, therefore we do not recommend using a heat mat if your snake is in a vivarium setup, this is due to the risk of thermal blocking (Where the sheer weight of a large bodied snake causes hot spots on the heat mat due to the heat reflecting back from the vivarium floor and into the snake). Thermal blocking can cause severe burns when heat mats are used inside the vivarium. Heat mats do have their place if used under a RUB (Really useful box) or in a stack system, but MUST be used with a mat stat. Heat should be therefore be provided using a ceramic heater/ heat bulb with pulse/dimmer thermostat and bulb guard. Ceramic



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heaters/bulbs give a good ambient air temperature which is preferred by heavy bodied snakes such as Royal Pythons.

**Humidity and Hydration:** Royal Pythons require an humidity level of around 50-60%, so it is advisable to buy a Hydrometer to monitor this. 50% is usually around room humidity so most keepers do not need to worry about humidity levels if the vivarium is set up correctly. If the humidity in your vivarium is too low, then a damp hide can be added. The easiest way to create a damp hide is to buy some Sphagnum Moss. Soak the moss in water, then squeeze as much liquid out as possible and place it in a hide for your Royal Python to use. Another method for upping the humidity levels is to lightly spray the sides of the vivarium with a misting of water from a spray bottle. Caution must be used when using this method, due to the proximity to the electrical equipment in your vivarium set up. If the humidity in your vivarium is too high then extra ventilation is needed. Spare vents can be easily ordered from online suppliers, but care should be taken when fixing the additional vents in place, so that your vivarium does not become damaged. It is important that the humidity level does not remain high as this can lead your Royal Python to develop a R.I (respiratory infection).

**Feeding:** Items like defrosted frozen rodents are ideal. Occasionally a defrosted frozen chick could be offered to give variety. Do not feed anything of unknown or dubious history such as wild or pet rodents or cat and road kills. Feed the snakes once every week to two weeks as adults and a little more frequently if younger. Feed one or two items that can be eaten in five to ten minutes. In the wild mice, rats and other mammals with a few small birds will make up the bulk of the diet. Defrosted frozen mice, ranging in size from pinkies to adults could be offered or even small rats if taken. These frozen foods may have to be offered warm. They are better than freshly killed animals as many of the parasites affecting snakes are killed by being frozen. In captivity a compromise may have to be made as a totally natural diet is neither readily available nor the type of food many people would be happy offering. Royal pythons have the reputation for being fussy feeders and some individuals may prove tricky. All pet royal pythons should be taking defrosted rodents when sold. It is beyond the scope of beginners and those keeping pet snakes to train a reluctant feeder. A water dish kept full of fresh water should always be available. This dish should be quite small so that the snake can drink but makes total immersion difficult. A larger bathing dish can be supplied for a few hours, a couple of times each week. Damp and wet conditions lead to skin ulceration and other diseases.

Please note that this is only an introductory guide based on our opinions and experience, we advise you to continually research and learn as much as possible from as many sources as you can, every animal is different and new care and information is always being developed and found 😊