



COASTWAY EXOTIC PETS

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REPTILE CARE SHEET The Corn and American Rat Snakes

These care sheets have been prepared by the Coastway Veterinary Group. The information will be useful for all first time exotic pet owners and for experienced owners who have just bought a new species. Information on breeding is not covered.

Before you buy your pet

Looking after any pet is a serious responsibility, ensuring it is properly fed, exercised and housed is only the start. Exotic pets need extra care and so can be a demanding option for any owner. There are several points to consider before taking one on.

- Check which species you are buying and exactly what the requirements of that species are.
- Ensure that your reptile is a product of captive breeding in the UK and was NOT wild caught and imported (this is an illegal and immoral trade).
- Remember, most reptile species kept as pets in the UK are not adapted for life in this climate so you will need to provide an environment that mimics their natural habitat *as closely as possible*.
- The majority of health problems suffered by pet reptiles are a direct result of incorrect housing and/or feeding. Most pet reptiles do not live nearly as long as their wild counterparts because they are not being kept under the right conditions.
- Remember to check what size your reptile will be when it is **fully grown!**
- All reptiles have bacteria in their gut, which may include Salmonella. But the risk to human health is low if you practise good hygiene.
- Vivaria should be cleaned regularly with a suitable reptile-safe disinfectant

Caring for a CORN & AMERICAN RAT SNAKES (Elaphe species)

1. Relatively easy to keep - good choice for beginners, although *can be aggressive*.
2. Natural life span: 15-20 years.
3. Size when fully grown (usually by 5years old): **75cm (2? feet)-260cm (8? feet)!!!** (depending on species – most only grow up to **150cm (5 feet)**).
4. Best kept **singly** but can be kept in pairs (male + female).
5. Housing:
 - Dark wooden vivarium with glass front and adequate ventilation.
 - 3 feet x 2 feet x 2 feet (90cmx60cmx60cm) for 1 or 2 adult snakes measuring up to 5 feet (150cm) long.
 - 6 feet x 2 feet x 2 feet (180cmx60cmx60cm) for 1 or 2 adult snakes measuring up to 8? feet (260cm) long.
 - Juveniles should be housed in a smaller vivarium, or in a plastic hatchling tub (9.5"x4"x4")/ (24x10x10cm) within a larger vivarium.



REPTILE CARE SHEET

The Corn and American Rat Snakes *continued*

6. UV Light Source:
 - Not essential for these snakes although some keepers recommend them.
 - If used choose a 2.0% UVB light & replace every 6months unless otherwise stated by manufacturer.
 - Should be on for 8-12 hours per day.
 - *Use with care if snake is albino as light intensity could damage eyes; also keep vitamin D3 supplements to a minimum if albino.*
7. Heat Source:
 - Either reflector spot-lights in green, red or blue, ceramic or tubular heaters or thermostatically-controlled heat mats.
8. Wire Mesh Guards should be fitted over all heat sources used within the vivarium, to prevent thermal burns.
9. Thermostat: essential to regulate internal temperature of vivarium.
10. Thermometers:
 - At least one at each end of the vivarium to give an accurate reading.
 - Maximum and minimum thermometer sets are useful as they give an idea of the temperature range in the part of the vivarium they are placed.
 - Never go by the temperature on the thermostat as these are often inaccurate.
11. Temperatures required:
 - **Basking area** (hot spot) at one end of vivarium (one third of total vivarium area): 27-28 deg. C (80-82 deg. F).
 - **Rest of vivarium:** 25-6 deg. C (75-78 deg. F).
 - **Night time:** can drop to 26 deg. C (78 deg. F) throughout vivarium (*NOT recommended if snake has respiratory infection*).
 - **Winter cooling/Brumation:** (not essential for these species; not recommended for snakes with respiratory infections / snakes that haven't eaten well during rest of year / hatchlings): 12-17 deg. C (52-62 deg. F) for 90 days (eg. end Oct-end Jan). Provide water throughout but *no food* from 2 weeks before beginning brumation.
12. Substrate:
 - Several options, eg. newspaper, brown paper, astro turf/"reptile grass", washable carpet-type material.
 - BUT it MUST be cleaned/changed regularly to prevent disease.
 - DO NOT use sand, corn cob, wood chippings or other substrate which could cause harm if swallowed during feeding.
 - Hides are essential and can be made from artificial plants, boxes, plant pots,caves, etc., *located away from the hot spot.*
14. Climbing facilities: eg. branches, not essential but will be used if provided.
15. Water:
 - Provide in sturdy bowl large enough for snake to bathe without restriction.
 - Must be changed daily to keep clean for drinking.
16. Food (must be pre-killed):
 - Hatchlings: One "pinky" mouse every 3-4 days.
 - Adults: 1 small rat or 2 adult mice every 7-10days.
 - Ensure frozen items have thawed to room temperature before feeding.
 - It is ILLEGAL to feed live rodents to reptiles.
 - Can supplement food with a multivitamin & calcium supplement, eg. Vetark Nutrobal, especially if attempting to breed (but see note under UV light re albinos).



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The Corn and American Rat Snakes *continued*

If you need more detailed information, you can call our Portslade surgery on 01273 426100, or refer to a specialist book or website for more information. You may find the following resources useful.

- *Exotic Animal Welfare Trust (EAWT) (charity) www.eawt.org
Tel: 01388 730500, Fax: 01388 730501*
- *British Chelonia Group (charity) www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk*
- *Tortoise Trust (charity) www.tortoisetrust.org*
- *The Care of Reptiles and Amphibians in Captivity by Chris Mattison, publ. Blandford.*

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