



## WESTERN HOGNOSE SNAKES

Average vivarium size Adult female 90cm x 45cm x 45cm / Adult male 60cm x 45 x 45 Be careful not to get or make a vivarium that is more than twice the suggested volume as it can put some snakes off feeding. You will need a small environment for a juvenile and upgrade the enclosure size as it grows. This is often best done by keeping the baby in a smaller tub within the main tank till it is of a more established size. This will offer the animal better controlled heat without the need for multiple upgrades.

Despite the popularity of rack/tub systems, we will not cover these here in this care sheet. This particular style of set up needs careful research as to the pro's and con's as well as a good background knowledge of husbandry if it is to work for you and your animal long term.

However it is worth pointing out that simply putting a baby snake in a small plastic tub will not suffice. While consideration may have been given to the required space, most people's homes do not offer enough background heat for something like a heat mat to effectively heat the animal enclosure. Unless the tub is then in a well insulated and/or controlled rack system.

**Helpful Hint.** When positioning hides and decor in the environment, always allow space directly under the heating element to allow the heat to reach the floor. This will help your vivarium function more efficiently, prevent super high temperature build up around the bulb and stop the floor from becoming cold. Although IR light is invisible to us it still reflects off a surface. It is still important to place hides etc around the enclosure. We would suggest they are placed just off centre of your heating source.



## **Vivarium Set-Up**

Your snake requires a non light emitting heat source from above that can remain on 24 hours a day. A well guarded ceramic bulb or DHP controlled by thermostat will work best. All heating should be positioned at one end of your vivarium to create a basking area. Your thermostat sensor and thermometer should be placed on the floor in the middle of your vivarium and be reading 28c/82f. Basking temperatures should be approximately 32c/90f Alternatively your sensor can be set at 30c/86f at the warm end wall on the floor, provided you are still achieving the desired ambient temperatures. The animal must always have access to temperatures less than 28c/82f at the furthest point from the heating. For lighting we suggest the shade dweller pro T5 unit. This will benefit the animal, allow you to see it, but without the high levels of harsh UVA.

## **Substrate, Cleaning and Tank Furniture**

A good natural substrate suitable for Hognose snakes is Aspen and lignocil. An alternative would be Leopard gecko bedding by Habistat. Despite the misleading name, we've found it to be the best sand based match for Hognoses. . The sand base bedding allows for a small amount of humidity for the odd light spraying around shedding time. Be careful when selecting a very dry substrate that your snake does not have shedding problems. Be equally aware that a lot of these snakes do not like damp/wet environments as it can cause skin and respiratory problems. Like with how a temperature gradient is required the same can be said for humidity. Instead of keeping the whole environment damp to maintain humidity across the whole enclosure during shedding. It is better to provide the animal with lots of hides with varying levels of humidity in then. Spread the substrate evenly across the bottom of the tank at a depth of approximately 6cm Hognose snakes like deep substrate to burrow in. It should be spot cleaned regularly and fully replaced every 6 weeks or longer if a good spot clean is performed regularly. Do not use household cleaning fluids as many are toxic. Use only disinfectants designed specifically for reptiles. Provide your animal with a water bowl big enough to fit your snake inside. Normal tap water is fine and you should only 25% fill your water bowl to prevent it from overflowing, should the animal try to fit its whole body in.

## **Hide and Decor**

A great deal of snakes, need tight spaces and solid surfaces to feel secure. Many snakes are what is know as 'Positively Thigmotactic' this essentially means the animal likes to wedge itself in to tight and solid places, as well as the feeling of contact with solid surfaces as it moves about its enclosure. Hognoses won't always be just content with a light weight plastic hide. When threatened they push out against the sides of a hide to prevent from being pulled out, so the more surface it has contact with as well as the more solid and heavier the hide, the safer it feels. This is why we often see the animals wedging themselves under a heavy bowl after pushing out the substrate or on top of a plastic hide in a rack, because the surfaces it is in contact with feel more secure by comparison to the lose hide its given the choice to sit under. Provide them with plenty of hide choices. Because of their compulsion to feel secure in a tight space, options are essential to suit your individual animal. Don't forget to change the hides as it grows and don't jump up through the hide choices too quickly. If you weren't to provide a suitable hiding place they like, in the right places, the animal for example might choose a spot

between the wall and water bowl in the cool end. Because it feels insecure elsewhere the animal could become cold, while choosing safety over the required temperature to feed.

Only use substrate and vivarium furniture from a reputable source and all heavy vivarium furniture should be securely positioned so it does not fall and hurt your animal.

### **Feeding**

Only use quality defrosted rodents like those from Ridgeway Frozen and Ridgeway Exotics. Make sure it is always thoroughly thawed before feeding. Do not attempt to defrost your rodent in the microwave or in water. Offer your snake one rodent via feeding tongs every 7 days, if it refuses to take, leave it in the vivarium overnight. If it still has not eaten try again the following week. All leftover food the following day should be thrown away and not re-frozen. When selecting a food size it should be big enough to create a small lump in your snake's belly or be at least the width of your snake's belly. If your snake becomes overweight and begins to show fatty lumps under the skin, start feeding your animal less often. Every 14-21 days should be fine or far smaller food on the normal routine. Once growth slows down, less food is often needed, watching the animal doesn't become over weight is very important. Consult an expert if you are unsure of the size/quantity of food required. Quite often though an adult female Hognose snake will never need anything bigger than a medium-large mouse once a week. Adult males small-medium. If your snake stops feeding, try warming the food on a plate above hot water until the food is above room temperature, then offer it to your snake. Also consider the size of its current environment and keeping your snake in a smaller while you grow it on a little more. Until your animal is feeding routinely again, remove all aspects of interaction.

Never handle your snake until the visible lump created from feeding has gone. It is normally safe to handle 48 hours after feeding.

### **Health And Handling**

If you are ever in doubt about the health of your snake call your supplier and if you are still in doubt go and see a recommended specialist veterinarian. Below will be listed a brief guide to help you know what to look for in a sick snake.

- *Prolonged lack of appetite*
- *Runny and bubbly nose*
- *Excess mucus around the mouth*
- *The skin giving a wrinkled or dehydrated appearance*
- *Mouth not closing properly*
- *Dull or unclear eyes (when not shedding)*
- *Inability to right itself or dizzy appearance*

During shedding, your snake's eyes will glaze over and its body colour will appear duller, this appearance will last up to a week, before it sheds. Always check your snake after it sheds to make sure all of the skin has come off. If your snake does not shed completely, call your supplier or a vet for advice on how to remove the un-shed skin. Around the time of your snake

shedding it is quite common for your snake to stop feeding and/or become very aggressive. Minimise the time spent with your animal to prevent stress or injury. Pay particular attention to the eyes after shedding. Sometimes a cap of old skin can remain and will need to be removed. If the eye is dull, wrinkled or has a ring of dry white skin around it, consult an expert for more advice. Do not ever attempt to remove an eye cap without the required experience.

After introducing your snake to the vivarium, be sure not to handle it until it has had 3-4 consecutive feeds. This will give you a good indication that your snake has settled into its new environment. Failure to do this could result in your new snake not feeding or becoming aggressive.

When it comes to handling a new snake it is a very good idea not to immediately approach the snake when entering the vivarium. Ask the person selling you the animal to show you the best approach. Often it is just a case of being confident and not going straight towards the head. If the snake seems nervous or you need to give yourself some confidence, use a snake stick to let the snake know you are there and then gently push the snake's head away from you. Then gently support the middle of the snake's body and bring it out of the tank all the time keeping the snake's head facing in the other direction.

Always remember snakes are very sensitive to their surroundings, especially the smell of food, body warmth and fast movements that may startle it, especially, if waved around its head. Any of these can evoke an uncharacteristic reaction, e.g. biting or striking.

To summarise, Hognose snakes are a great 'next step' snake. It's important to remember these snakes have a mild venom and love to eat. It's not uncommon for them to mistake fingers for food. Learn to read your animal and its movements that indicate it attempting to feed. Should it bite, remove yourself from its mouth as quickly and as safely as possible for both you and the snake. They are known as rear fanged, meaning the venom injecting teeth are at the back of the mouth, making have for them to envenomate a person, but not impossible. Should you be envenomated the reaction is very mild in most cases. Most will just see swelling. However, should it become extremely painful or you get any other symptoms, a suitable qualified person should be consulted. There's a huge amount of choices with colours, they are simple to keep and often very laid back. At an average length of 30-60cm and a slender body, they are a manageable size too. As with any pet, research is key. Especially the long term commitment of a snake. There's now 100's of colours and patterns to choose from so something to suit the whole family.

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