Wild Science

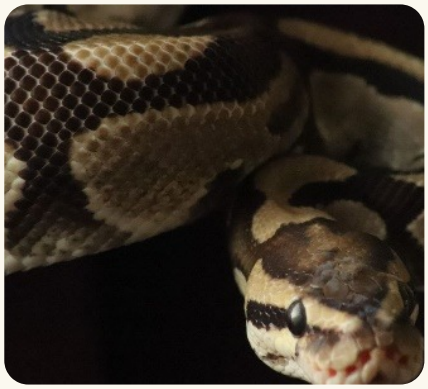
Animals · Care sheet

Royal Python

Care Sheet

LIFESPAN	SIZE	HUMIDITY	TEMPERATURE
20–30 years	**150 cm**	**50–60%**	**24–32 °C**
in captivity	(5 ft)	boost up to 80%	hot end 30–32 °C cool end 24–26 °C

Get to know



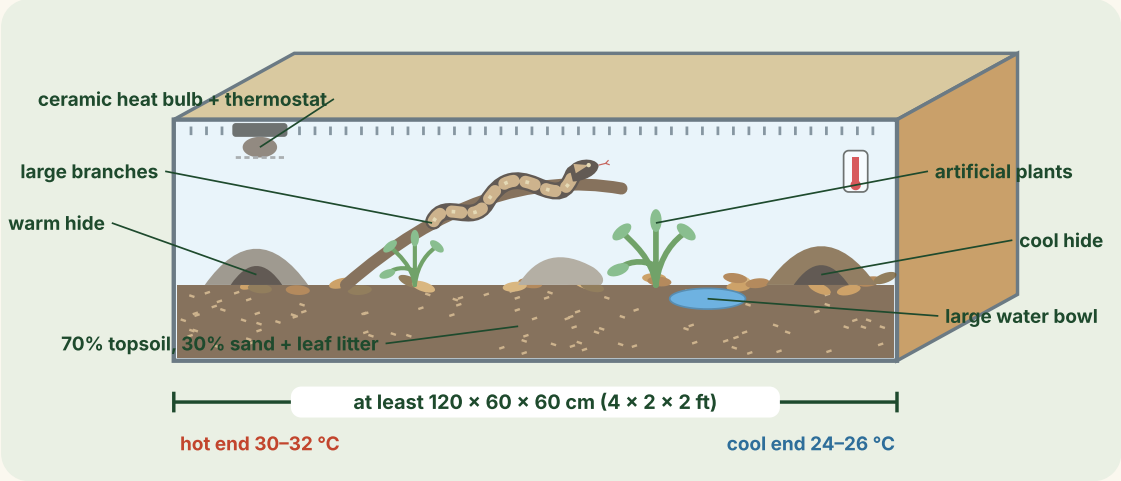
Royal pythons come from the grasslands and open forests of Central and West Africa, where they eat small mammals like rats and mice, and sometimes birds or lizards. They are gentle, curious snakes, most active at night. The name “royal” comes from African chiefs wearing them as a symbol of status; they are also called ball pythons, because they curl into a ball when threatened.

Learn your python’s likes, dislikes and signs of distress or illness. Approach slowly and calmly at first. Once you’ve built a bond, it will learn your scent and you may discover it has quite a personality.

Enclosure

Use a spacious, well-ventilated vivarium with secure doors, as royals can be escape artists. It should be at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm. Avoid large empty spaces, which stress them; add plenty of cover and several hides. Upgrade the enclosure as your snake grows.

A royal python vivarium. Plenty of cover and a hide at each end: big empty spaces make them stressed.



Temperature

Royal pythons are cold-blooded and need a reliable heat source. Use an overhead lamp with a ceramic heat bulb at one end, controlled by a thermostat, for a basking spot of 30–32 °C, with the cooler end at 24–26 °C.

Environment

Substrate

70% organic topsoil and 30% child-safe play sand, deep enough to dig, with leaf litter on top. Mist the bedding daily.

Décor

Large branches and rocks to climb for exercise and natural behaviour. Two hides, one in the warm zone and one in the cool, and artificial plants for cover.

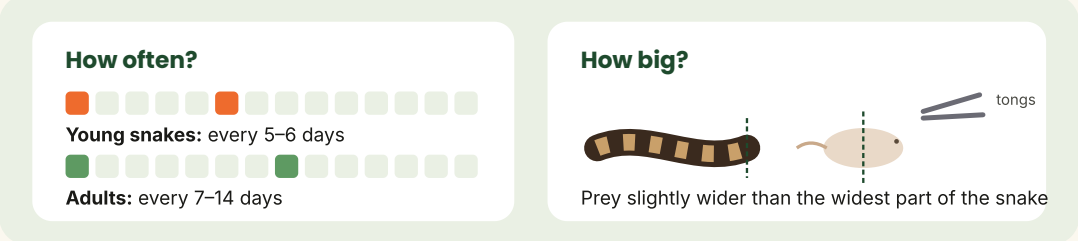
Cleaning

Spot clean waste as you see it. Replace all substrate at least once a month and clean thoroughly with a reptile-safe disinfectant.

Diet

In captivity, royals mainly eat mice and rats from pet shops, sized to suit your snake.

Feeding guide. Always use feeding tongs, so your snake doesn't link your hand with food.



Water: fresh water every day in a bowl big enough to bathe in. Remove dirty water straight away.

Royal python's weight

You can tell by the shape of the body.

Royal python weight and shape. The body seen in cross-section.



Shedding

Snakes shed in one large piece as they grow, more often when young. Before a shed the skin looks dull and the eyes glazed; avoid handling. If parts of the shed are still attached, soak your snake in a lukewarm bath to soften them. Frequent shedding problems can mean the heat and humidity need checking.

Retained eye caps

If old skin stays on the eyes, deal with it promptly: a lukewarm soak can help, and if that doesn't free it, speak to a reptile vet.

Health and welfare

A healthy royal python has:

- Bright eyes
- Smooth, firm skin
- A clean vent
- An engaged, active manner
- Regular eating and drinking
- Strong muscle tone and awareness





If in doubt, see a reptile vet

Never try to remove anything from its skin or insert anything into its body.

Diseases and concerns

Check your snake daily and see a reptile vet if you notice anything unusual.

Constipation

Swelling near the tail. A lukewarm soak may help; if not, see a vet.

Mites

Tiny black parasites around the eyes, mouth and under the scales. They lay eggs in the substrate, so clean and disinfect regularly.

Research

Learn about the health problems royal pythons can have.

Transport

Keep your python safe and comfortable when you travel:

- Enough space without being knocked around
- A cloth bag or light cloth for calming darkness
- Well ventilated, but secure against escape
- Bring a battery heat pack or warm water bottle