

Supplements

Dietary supplements are not needed as your boa constrictor should be receiving complete nutrition through the rodent food sources.

Tips For a Happy, Healthy Animal

- Interact with your boa constrictor in the evening when they are most active.
- Take your new boa constrictor to an experienced reptile veterinarian for a general health exam and to test for parasites.
- Leave a newly purchased boa constrictor alone in its enclosure for 1-2 weeks to acclimate to its new home.
- Use a pillowcase or locking, secured, plastic ventilated container that accommodates your snake's size comfortably as a transport container for short trips.
- Provide an appropriately sized, safe enclosure that can be securely fastened.

It is Important to Avoid

- Live prey as this may lead to injury to your pet.
- Enclosures that allow for escape or injury (including entrapment in cage furniture or skin trauma from tape or other adhesives used within the enclosure.)
- Unsuitable substrates such as cedar, corncob, wood chip/shavings, gravel or rocks.
- Electrical "rock heaters" which are a serious hazard that can cause severe thermal burns..
- Direct contact with any heat bulbs, UV bulbs, ceramic heat emitters and unregulated heating pads.
- Low temperatures: (below 80°F (27°C) during the day and 78°F (25°C) at night).
- Soiled water.
- Cats, dogs and other pets.
- Interaction with unsupervised children.

Common Disorders

- | | |
|---|--|
| ● Intestinal parasites | ● Mites and ticks |
| ● Respiratory disease | ● Cloacal Prolapse |
| ● Stomatitis (oral infection) | ● Thermal wounds from inappropriate heat sources |
| ● Dysecdysis or retained shed on body or over the eyes (retained spectacle) | ● Skin infections |
| | ● Bite wounds from live prey |

Many commonly seen conditions are the result of malnutrition and/or inadequate housing and are preventable.

Additional Reading

- The Art of Keeping Snakes*, Philippe de Vosjoli
- The Complete Boa Constrictor: A Comprehensive Guide to Care, Breeding, and Geographic Races*, Vincent Russo
- Red-Tailed Boas*, Ben Aller and Mark K. Bayless
- The Boa Constrictor Manual*, Philippe de Vosjoli
- Regular visits to your reptile veterinarian should be scheduled to check for parasites and other early signs of disease and to promote a long, satisfying relationship with your Boa Constrictor. For help in finding a reptile/amphibian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians (www.ARAV.org) or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (www.ABVP.com/diplomate)

**HOW TO
KEEP YOUR
BOA CONSTRICTOR
HEALTHY, HAPPY
AND SAFE!**



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NATURAL HISTORY

Boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*) are a group of large, heavy bodied, docile snakes that are commonly kept and bred in captivity. Boa constrictors are members of the boidae family and have a wide distribution ranging from Mexico, through Central and South America, and some islands in the Caribbean. This care sheet will be focusing on the two most common subspecies of boa constrictors, the Common or Colombian boa (*Boa constrictor imperator*) and the Red tailed boa (*Boa constrictor constrictor*).

What to Expect From My Animal

Boa constrictors (*B.c imperator* and *B.c constrictor*) are one of the most popular larger sized snakes in the pet trade. They tend to have docile temperaments and tolerate handling well. However, they do not respond to their owners like dogs or cats do, and generally prefer to be left alone. Although these snakes start off small, they eventually grow into large animals that can reach up to 11 feet long (3.4 meters long) and weigh between 20-60 pounds (9-27 kg) (depending on sex and subspecies). Boa constrictors will need custom enclosures to accommodate their size. Boa constrictors also have a long lifespan of about 20-30+ years. When frightened, boas usually retreat if able, but can strike or bite, if provoked.

Is My Animal Male or Female?

Boa constrictors are difficult to sex without the appropriate tools and knowledge. As adults, males are generally smaller than females and have a broader, thicker tail with larger spurs next to the vent. An experienced reptile veterinarian can determine sex at any age, typically by using a cloacal probe.

Housing and Substrate

Since Boa constrictors are not social animals, they should be housed individually to avoid stress.

Housing should be an escape proof enclosure that is appropriately sized for the snake. As a general rule, the enclosure should be at least 75% the length of the snake (the snake should be able to lay more than 2/3 of its body straight in the enclosure). Boa constrictors have a fast growth rate, so you must be prepared to update the size of the enclosure several times as your boa grows. Juvenile boas can be kept in a 20 gallon long tank or a 30"x12"x12" (75x30x30cm) enclosure. As adults, the minimum size enclosure should be 48"x24"x24" (120x60x60cm). If you have an adult female boa constrictor, an enclosure 72"x24"x24" (180x60x60cm) is necessary. Boa constrictors appreciate the space, so larger enclosures are ideal. Glass tanks are convenient for smaller boas but they are harder to keep at consistent temperatures and they do not hold humidity well. There are several types of custom wood or plastic enclosures available that can be heated reliably and kept in appropriate humidity ranges.

Investing in a custom enclosure is recommended as this is what will be needed to house your boa constrictor as an adult. There should be a dark, secure hide box on both ends of the enclosure (the warm side and the cool side). A water bowl that is large enough for the entire snake to coil in must be provided. Substrate can be non-particulate (such as reptile carpeting, indoor/outdoor carpeting, paper towels, newspaper) or particulate bedding (such as reptile bark, reptile dirt mixtures, or bioactive substrates). Non-particulate bedding is preferred as it can be most easily cleaned and replaced. Particulate substrates should be spot cleaned whenever an elimination occurs and replaced completely at least monthly. Bioactive substrates are naturalistic, self-

WHAT YOUR VETERINARIAN LOOKS FOR IN A HEALTHY BOA CONSTRICTOR

Vital Statistics:

Body length

6-11 feet (1.8-3.4 meters)
(depending on subspecies and sex)

Body weight

20-60 pounds (9-27kg)
(depending on age, sex and subspecies)

Age of sexual maturity

18 months to 3 years (depending on sex)

Longevity

20-30+ years

● Rounded body shape (not triangular)

● Active tongue when handled

● Eyes clear

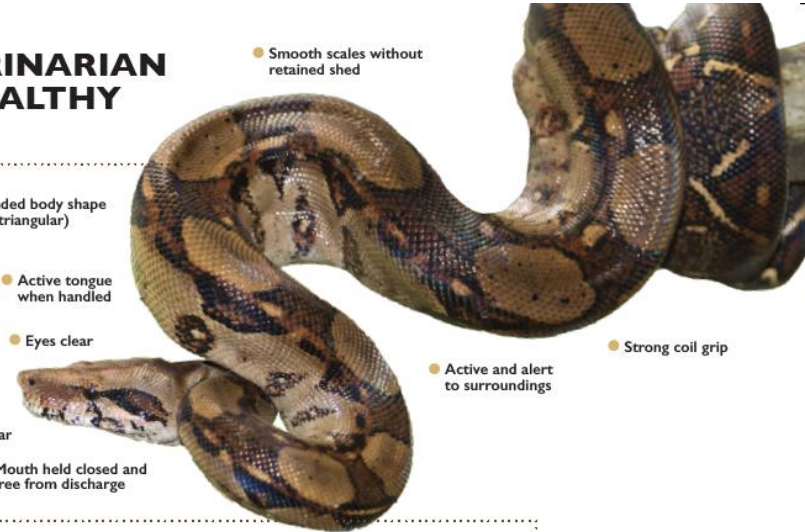
● Nose clear

● Mouth held closed and free from discharge

● Smooth scales without retained shed

● Strong coil grip

● Active and alert to surroundings



NOTE: Most, if not all, reptiles and amphibians carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces, so they are unsuitable pets for very young children and those with compromised immune systems. Good hygiene must always be practiced around all reptiles and amphibians, including boa constrictors. For more information, please see the handout, Salmonella Information for Reptile Owners at <http://arav.org/salmonella-bacteria-reptiles>.



sustaining, self-maintaining environments which do not require full exchanges, but are more complex to establish. Consult with your experienced reptile veterinarian prior to setting up a bioactive substrate for your boa.

Temperature and Humidity Requirements

The ambient temperature should be around 85°F (29°C) with a basking "hot spot" of 90-92°F (32-33°C). The cool side of the enclosure should not drop below 80°F (27°C) during the day. The temperature can drop to around 78°F (25°C) at night, but this is not necessary. Heat can be provided with special reptile heating pads, fluorescent or ceramic heating bulbs, heat tape, or a radiant heat panel. The use of a thermostat or rheostat is advised (and essential if using heat tape or radiant heat panels) to ensure that temperatures remain accurate and consistent. A rheostat can also prevent overheating of the heating element, thus helping to prevent thermal burns to your boa. If using a heat bulb or ceramic heat emitter, it should be above the lid of the enclosure so the snake cannot come into contact with it. Cold snakes are inclined to coil around a heat source, such as a heat bulb or ceramic heat emitter, and this can cause severe thermal burns.

The humidity should be between 60-80%. You can also provide a "humid hut" which is a hide that contains moistened sphagnum moss or paper towels for a focal region of high humidity. Any material used in a humid hide should be changed every 1-2 weeks to prevent mold or bacterial growth. Humidifiers and misting can be used to reach and maintain this humidity.

Lighting Requirements

UV lighting should be provided for 12-14 hours daily to mimic natural daylight. UVB lighting is not critical for Boa constrictors, however, it may help with calcium metabolism. UVA lighting helps promote normal behaviors. Setting this lighting on a timer can help provide consistent lighting for your reptile.

Diet

Boa constrictors typically feed readily on appropriately sized rodents and rarely present with feeding problems. As a general rule for appropriate sized rodents, avoid feeding with rodents that are wider than the widest part of your snake's body. Juvenile boas should be offered hopper (juvenile furred mice) or small mice once a week. As they grow, the rodent size should also increase. When they are approximately 3 feet (1 meter) long, they can eat small rats and when they are around 5-6 feet (1.5-2.0 meters) long, they can be fed large rats. Very large boas may eventually feed on several jumbo rats or small rabbits. Once your boa is an adult, you can decrease feedings to once every 2 weeks.

Avoid feeding live prey whenever possible. Live prey can bite and cause significant injury to your snake. Boa constrictors readily accept frozen thawed prey items. If your snake will only eat live rodents, never leave the feeder animal unattended with your boa constrictor. If your boa constrictor does not strike and kill the rodent within 15 minutes, remove the prey animal from the enclosure.

It is best to feed your snake in a secured container that is separate from his normal housing. Whenever possible, feed your snake in the evening, as this is the time when your snake will be most active thus mimicking normal feeding behaviors.

Water

Water is provided in a large bowl. This bowl should be large enough for your snake to coil his entire body into. Change the water whenever it is soiled and at least weekly.

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In case of any signs of illness, discomfort, or behavioural changes in your pet, it is imperative to seek immediate veterinary attention. Early diagnosis and treatment are critical to the effective management of veterinary health issues.

For further information or to schedule an appointment, please contact our clinic directly. Our team is committed to providing the highest level of care for your pet.

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