

King and Milk Snakes (*Lampropeltis* species)

Origins: These snakes occur across a wide range of most of North America, including northern Mexico. Many are brightly coloured and mimic the warning patterns of venomous snakes. They must be kept singularly, as they are highly cannibalistic – hence the name King snakes, as they will even eat highly venomous individuals.

Adult Size and Life Span: King and Milk Snakes are medium snakes and can reach a maximum adult size of 200cm (6'). All species can live to around 20 years in captivity.

Diet and Feeding: When young, these snakes should be fed pinkies or fluffs, depending on size. Adult snakes will take adult mice. You should ensure that the rodents you are feeding are clean and appear healthy and are defrosted thoroughly before feeding. Feeding is achieved usually by presenting the food using tweezers to the snake – most will snap and take the prey quickly. Only feed your snake once every 7 – 10 days – as they are opportunists in the wild, snakes will feed whenever presented and can easily become overweight which can cause serious problems. Clean drinking water should be available every day via a large water bowl.

Vivarium Set Up: A vivarium size of 48" x 15" x 18" would be sufficient for these species when adult. All snakes are excellent escape artists and so whilst young, could be housed in a ventilated plastic box within the main vivarium. Locks are available that help to maintain a routine of ensuring doors are properly closed. A basic layout is shown in the diagram. Within this set up, there must be:-

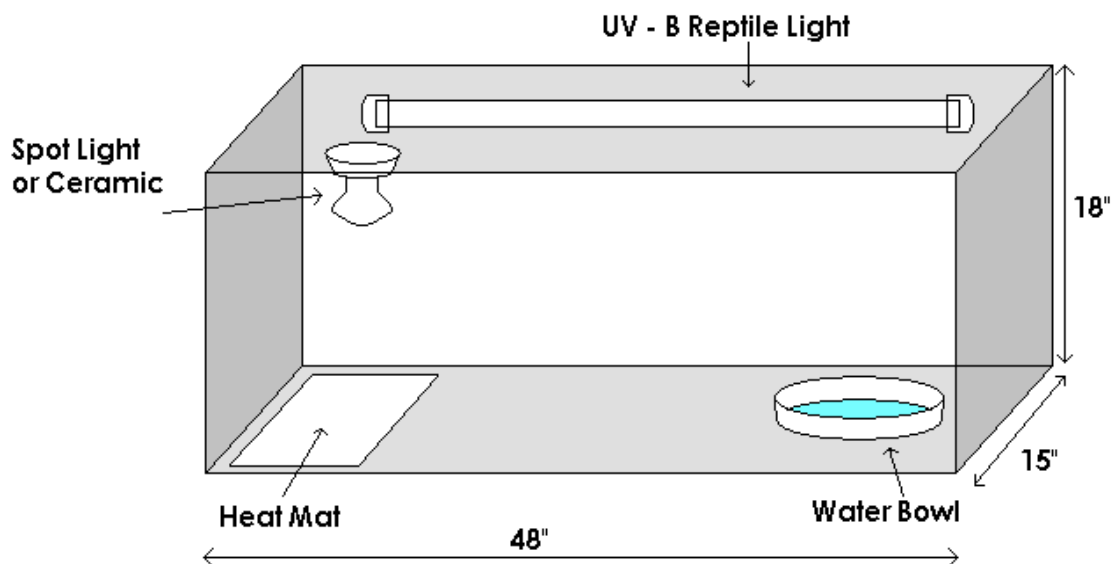
Heating: Snakes are entirely dependent on external heat sources to generate energy – this is achieved via heat mats, spot bulbs or infra-red ceramics with mesh guards to prevent the snake burning themselves. These may need to be controlled via thermostats. There should be a temperature

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gradient present, with highest temperatures of 80 – 86°F (26.7 – 30°C) and coolest to 68 - 75°F (20 – 23.9°C). Night-time temperatures can be cooler still, room temperature if the snake is housed inside. The water bowl must be placed in the cooler end of the vivarium.

Lighting: A UV-B bulb is not essential but will ensure that vitamin D₃ is correctly synthesised and the animal will maintain a strong skeleton. Use a Reptiglo 5.0 bulb, across the back of the vivarium, for 10 -12 hours per day as a simulation of natural daylength.

Substrate and Decoration: Beech chip is a good substrate for these species, but orchid bark can also be used. Provide rocks, cork bark and wood to create caves and climbing areas.



Further Information and Advice: It is recommended that you read and gain as much information as possible before purchasing your snake. Books and reliable websites are good sources, or alternatively ask a member of staff. Phone advice is available 9am-6pm, 7 days a week on 01953 718184.