

Pythons and Boas

Common and Red-Tailed Boas (*Boa constrictor constrictor*)

Royal Pythons (*Python regius*)

Carpet Pythons (*Morelia species*)

Origins: These snakes occur in a variety of habitats but require similar maintenance and husbandry. Boa constrictors occur in South and Central America. Pythons occur across Africa, Asia and Australasia.

Adult Size and Life Span: Boa constrictors can become around 320cm (10') with a large girth. Royal Pythons reach a maximum of 180cm (6'). Carpet pythons reach up to 400cm (13') with a large girth. These snakes, when adult, weigh a great deal and should not be handled alone. Species can live from 25 - 60 years in captivity – for boas to some python species respectively.

Diet and Feeding: When young, these snakes should be fed pinkies or fluffs, depending on size. As snakes grow, the diet can be changed to adult mice or large rats, depending on size. 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: Vivarium size varies with these species – Royal Pythons can be kept in large vivariums when adult – either 48" x 15" x 18" or a tall vivarium – 36" x 15" x 48" to give good climbing areas. The larger species require much larger set ups to accommodate their size – some keepers convert small

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rooms into vivariums. 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. Basic layouts are shown in the diagrams. Within these set ups, there must be:-

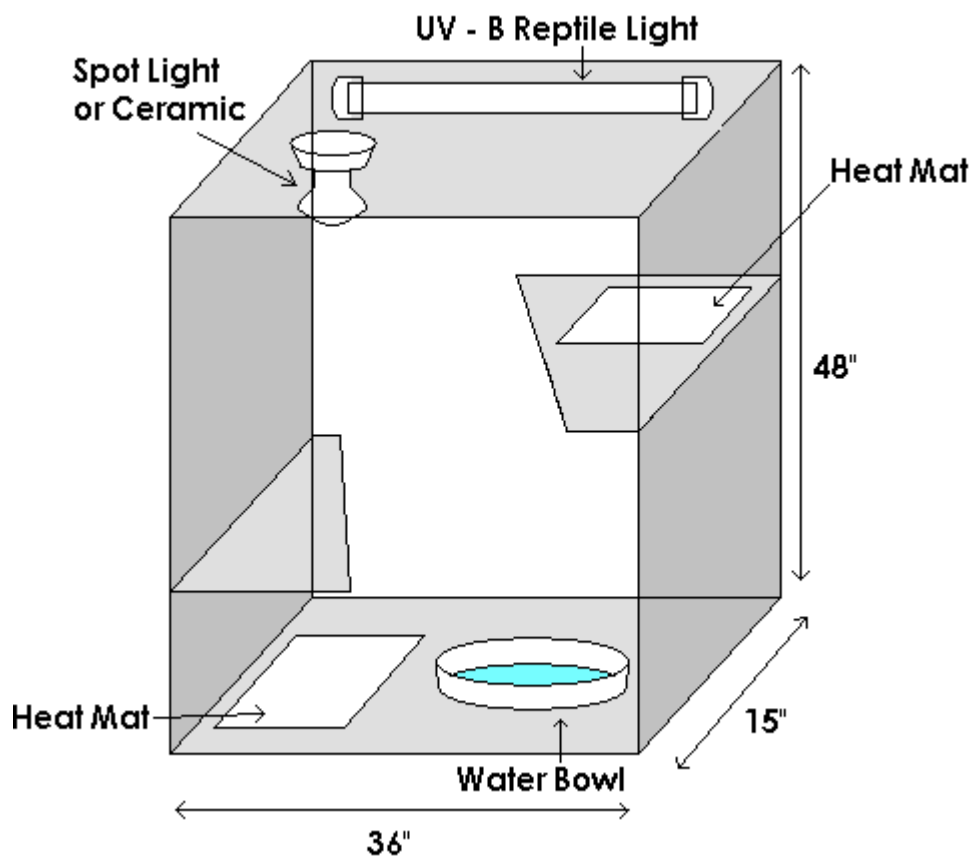
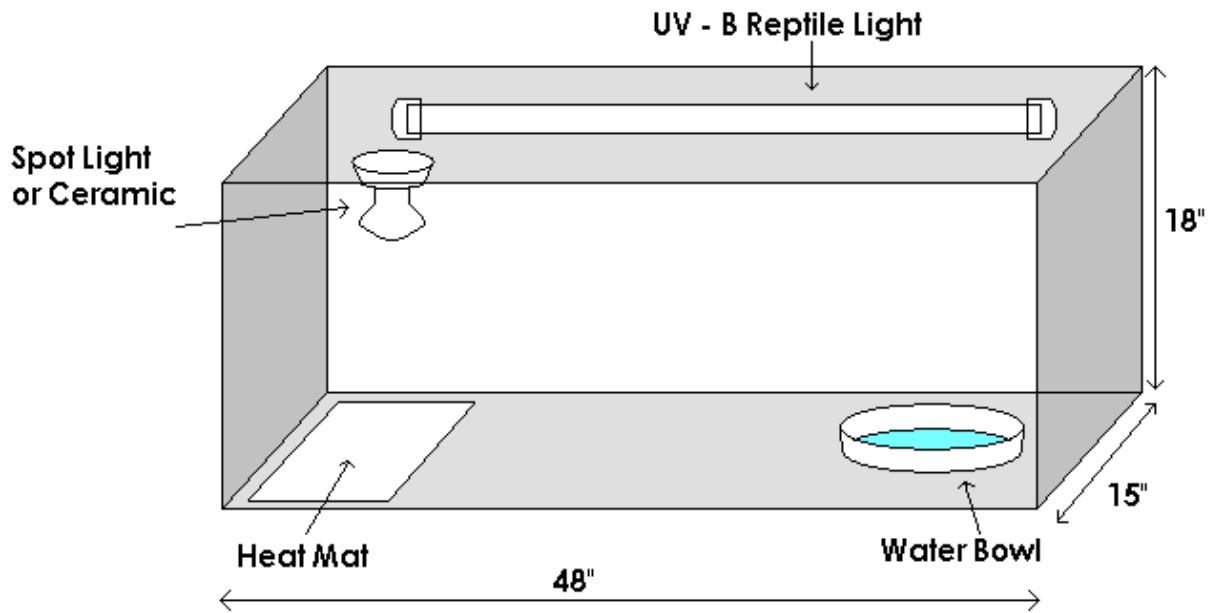
Heating: Snakes are entirely dependent on external heat sources to generate energy – this is achieved via heat mats, spot bulbs or infra-red ceramics with mesh guards to prevent the snake burning themselves. These may need to be controlled via thermostats. There should be a temperature gradient present, 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. In larger vivariums, higher wattage bulbs and heaters are required to create and maintain the temperatures required. 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: Species such as Boa Constrictors and Burmese Pythons are rainforest species, they require relatively high humidity. We would recommend that such animals be provided with orchid bark which can be regularly sprayed to provide good ambient humidity. Such substrates should be allowed to dry out and should never be saturated. Other more dessert/arid species such as Royal and Carpet Pythons will require a dryer substrate. In these cases beech chips would be a better choice.

Always provide hides and branches within taller vivariums, shelves can be provided with heat pads.

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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.