

Python Care – *Antaresia* species

There are four species of pythons in the *Antaresia* genus including the Children's python, Stimson's python, Spotted python and Pygmy python. These are relatively small python species.

They are typically ground dwellers. With proper care and handling these snakes are often gentle and placid, making them easy-going, enjoyable pets.



LIFE SPAN: 20-25 years
HATCHLING LENGTH: 20cm-33cm
ADULT LENGTH: 60cm – 140cm
SEXUAL MATURITY: 18 months – 2.5 years old
(species dependent)
OVIPAROUS (they lay eggs)
CLUTCH SIZE: 65-18 eggs

Diet

All pythons are obligate carnivores and feed on whole prey. The size of the food item to be fed will vary depending on the size of the python. These prey items should ethically killed, thawed whole prey items such as mice, small rats and day old chicks. These items can be sourced from reputable reptile stores or pet stores. It is neither ethical nor legal to feed live prey items to pythons.

Hatchlings and juvenile pythons should be fed once weekly. Adults should only be fed once every 2-3 weeks. Over-feeding pythons leads to obesity and other issues. Food items must be properly thawed prior to feeding. Warm water should be used to thaw food items and food should never be thawed in the microwave as it will not be evenly defrosted. Food items can be fed using long tongs. It is important your snake is kept warm and left undisturbed for several days to allow proper digestion of food. Any uneaten food must be removed from the enclosure.

Your python should be fed 10% body weight at each feed or a food item that roughly equates to the size of their head.

Housing

Pythons should be housed in secure vivarium. The vivarium size should be a minimum of 80cm (L) x 50cm (W) x 40cm (H) for a grown adult Stimson's python. However, the larger the better and snakes should ideally have room to move around and exercise. Vivariums should be well ventilated to prevent excessive moisture and buildup of waste and micro-organisms in the environment. Drawer systems are problematic as they are small in size, do not allow an adequate thermal gradient and lack any enrichment for the snake. We do not recommend this housing system for snakes.

A hygienic substrate such as newspaper, paper towel or recycled paper litter is best. Organic substrates such as sand and bark can favour the growth of germs and micro-organisms which can cause disease in pythons. If sand is used it should ideally be used in a separate box for enrichment rather than using this as the substrate for the entire enclosure. If organic substrates are used, it is important this is replaced regularly and the enclosure thoroughly disinfected each time. Enclosures should be sanitised using a suitable disinfectant such as F10 SC®.

Enclosure furnishings should include a rock or similar platform for basking .

The enclosure should also have at least one hide and a large, shallow, sturdy water dish for your snake to drink from and bathe in.

Heating & Humidity

All reptiles need to be housed in their preferred optimal temperature zone (POTZ). This is the temperature range where the reptiles physiological processes and immune system function optimally and allows the reptile to thermoregulate according to their bodily needs.

The enclosure should have a cool end and a warm end so that the snake can move throughout the enclosure to regulate their body temperature. For most *Antaresia* species the cool end should be between 25-27°C. A basking spot needs to be provided, this is where your python has access to heat and light in a condensed space. They will enjoy lying in this spot for several hours a day. The basking spot should be kept between 32-35°C for most pythons of the *Antaresia* genus. Temperatures should be monitored using both thermostats and an infrared temperature gun.

Coil or infrared heat lamps work best but they must be protected with a mesh cage to prevent pythons from wrapping around the heat lamp causing serious burns. Heat coils as alternatives or in addition to heat lamps but heat lamps tend to work best. Heat mats carry a

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higher risk of causing burn injuries and are typically not recommended. It is also very important not to use heat globes inside a plastic enclosure as this poses a serious fire risk.

Heating should be provided 24 hours a day for hatchlings, for some adult pythons it may be appropriate to turn heating off overnight, however temperatures need to be monitored and temperatures should not fall below 20°C overnight.

Humidity should be kept between 40-60% for most python species. Pythons from more tropical climates eg Green Tree pythons can tolerate a higher humidity than desert species such as Carpet pythons. Humidity can be monitored using a hygrometer attached to the vivarium.

Lighting

An appropriate UV light source should be placed in close proximity to the heat lamp for basking and should be switched on for 12 hours a day.

It was previously believed that pythons only required a UVA lamp and that UVB was not required as pythons eat whole prey including skeletons (UVB has a role in calcium metabolism). However, recent research has demonstrated that UVB may be very beneficial for the overall health of pythons.

UV lights need to be changed at least every 6 months

Socialisation

Most pythons do best housed individually. However, some can be housed in pairs, provided the enclosure is large enough.

Pythons should never be left to interact with other pets due to the risk of injury to your python and/or other pets.

Quarantine

Any new reptile additions to the household should be quarantined for a minimum of six months. Unfortunately, there are a variety of infectious viruses that can be carried (without symptoms) for several months and even years in reptiles making it difficult to determine an adequate quarantine period but a minimum of six months is currently recommended.

The quarantined reptile/s should be housed in a completely separate room as far away as possible from established reptiles in the household. Utensils used should not be shared and ideally the handler should

change clothes and thoroughly sanitise before handling. All equipment should also be disinfected.

Quarantined animals should be the last to be handled in the household to minimise risk of infectious disease transmission. There are a number of viral tests that can be screened for during the quarantine process. Discuss this with your reptile veterinarian for more information

Health Care

It is strongly recommended that your python visit an experienced reptile veterinarian when first acquired. At this visit your vet can discuss husbandry, general health care and perform a physical health exam.

The veterinarian can also sex your snake (determine gender) using a cloacal probe. Snakes can also be microchipped under a short sedation or anaesthetic. Annual health checks are then recommended thereafter. Although more frequent health checks are recommended for senior animals or animals with ongoing health conditions.



Enrichment Ideas

- Live plants in the vivarium
- A variety of natural branches and logs for your python to climb
- A large cave to hide in
- A large water dish your python can submerge and bathe in
- Sand pit to bury in
- Spending time outside exposed to natural sunlight