

# Temperature Fluctuations & Herp Health

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*The temperature of your herp's environment affects many facets of his health.*

In the wild, herps actively maintain proper body temperature on their own. Herps are ectothermic - cold blooded - which means they do not generate their own body heat. Instead, a wild herp moves from place to place, from sun to shade and back, in order to attain the optimum temperature he needs to thrive. This process is known as thermo-regulation.

The temperature of your herp's environment affects many aspects of his health. For example, an iguana can become constipated if the temperature gets too low. And your snake may not eat if the temperature falls more than a few degrees below optimum because his instincts tell him it is time to hibernate.

In captivity, your herp relies on you to provide an environment that he needs to stay healthy. Neither constant warmth nor constant cold is good for your reptile. For the majority of the year, a reptile will need both primary and secondary heat sources to maintain good health. A temperature gradient should be provided to allow your herp to move around the different temperature zones you create, such as basking areas or other cooler areas:



- **A primary heat source** is necessary to keep the temperature of the entire cage within the proper range. A series of incandescent [lights](#) over the cage is one of the best heat sources. At night, these lights will need to be turned off and another heat source may be needed depending on the ambient

temperature. A [heating pad](#) placed under the cage, ceramic infrared heat emitters or panels, or [nocturnal incandescent light bulbs](#) which produce heat, but little visible light, can be used.

- **A secondary heat source** creates more heat in specific areas of the cage to provide a temperature gradient. To best supply this gradient, the secondary heat source should cover only 25-30% of the surface of the enclosure. The secondary heat source could be a 50-75 watt incandescent bulb in a [ceramic base](#), securely mounted where the animal can not touch it. There are also special '[basking lights](#)' available. Either type of light should shine down on a particular basking area from outside the cage. An under-the-tank heater (placed at one end of the tank only, thus creating a cool side and a warm side) is another option.

### Controls & Cautions

Keep an eye on the temperature of your herp's environment with a good thermometer, such as the [Exo-Terra Liquid Crystal thermometer](#) or our [Precision Analog Thermometer](#).



### Tips for temperature control and pet safety:

- Temperatures in your home may vary five or more degrees between furnace cycles, or when air conditioning kicks in. Most herps require a significant difference between day and night temperatures. To accurately adjust these temperatures, even when you are not at home, we recommend use of programmable thermostats.
- Install thermometers to monitor both cold and hot zones of the habitat.
- Use an appropriately sized [rheostat](#) to manually control the temperature of basking lamps to keep them at a temperature appropriate for your herp.
- Be very careful how you place your lights and heat sources. Iguanas especially are prone to lying too close, and can be burned as a result.
- Install a smoke detector in any room where you are using heat generating devices.
- Hot rocks are not recommended.

Since natural temperature requirements vary widely from species to species, remember to research your pet's particular needs. You can successfully keep your herp happy and healthy with an informed eye, the right equipment, and a careful consideration of how environmental temperature changes affect your pet.

## We Recommend



### [Repti Basking Spot Lamps](#)

lets reptiles regulate their own temperature by accessing the light and heat of the "sun."



[Repti Temp Rheostat](#) gives you precise, fingertip control of heat rocks, lamps, or foggers.



### [Fluker's Digital Display Thermo-Hygrometer](#)

measures humidity and temperature levels to maintain terrarium consistency.