

Ball Python Habitats, How to Create

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Ball Pythons are great for new snake owners, as they are fairly easy to care for. However, though they are not difficult snakes to maintain, it is just as important to set up their habitat properly as it would be with any other reptile. They have unique housing requirements that are necessary to preserve their overall health and well-being. The following tips will help you to set up the best habitat possible for your Ball Python.

Enclosure/Cage

The size of the terrarium will vary with the age of the snake. Young hatchlings will only need a 10 to 20 gallon terrarium. However, as your Ball Python ages and grows longer, a significantly larger terrarium will be necessary. Young adults need at least a 20 gallon terrarium, and full grown adults will need at least a 30 gallon terrarium. A good rule of thumb to follow is that the perimeter (two times the width plus two times the length) of the enclosure should be two times the length of your snake. Keep in mind that if you purchase a smaller terrarium when you have a younger snake, you will have to upgrade it later, possibly more than once.

Ball Pythons are excellent escape artists, so a tight fitting lid or door with a lock is an absolute necessity. It should be made of wire mesh to provide proper ventilation.

Appropriate substrates that you can use in the enclosure include cypress mulch, paper towels, [terrarium carpet liners](#), and newspaper. Never use shavings. Be sure to keep some extra substrate around so you can switch it when it becomes soiled. Substrates like terrarium carpet liners can be cleaned and reused.

- A. [Fresh Air Screen Cover](#) with [Cover Clips](#)
- B. [Dome light](#) with [ceramic heater](#) and black or [red](#) reptile bulb
- C. [Fluorescent Strip Light](#), on a [Timer](#)
- D. [Thermometers and Hygrometer](#)
- E. Artificial [Plants](#) for cover
- F. [Hide Box](#)
- G. [Water Bowl](#)
- H. Climbing branches, like the [Exo Terra Forest Branch](#)
- I. [Terrarium Carpet Liner](#) or other safe substrate
- J. [Under Tank Heater \(UTH\)](#)

Landscaping and Cage Accessories

There are two main things that your Ball Python absolutely must have in his enclosure - a hidebox and climbing branches. Because they are nocturnal, Ball Pythons will spend most of their days in the hidebox, which can be a hollow log, a wide terra cotta flower pot turned upside down with the drain hole enlarged, a cardboard box, or any other item that provides darkness. The hidebox must be big enough that your snake can fit his entire body in it, but not so big that it is significantly larger than your snake.

Climbing branches will provide both a hiding place and a basking area for your snake. Using artificial greenery to screen part of the branches from view will give your snake a place to curl up out of sight. Putting the branches in the basking area of the cage will allow him to climb closer to the heat source if he needs to raise his body temperature.

Other landscaping can include a few large rocks for your Ball Python to bask on and a small pool of water where he can drink from and submerge himself occasionally. A food dish is not required in the habitat as Ball Pythons should be placed in separate enclosures (such as a large plastic container or tub) for feeding.

Temperature

We recommend maintaining the temperature of the habitat at 80° to 85°F during the day, with a 90° to 94°F basking area, and at 75°F overnight. Use two thermometers to monitor temperature, one under the light in the basking area and one near the floor on the other side of the enclosure.

Primary heat sources are used to regulate the ambient temperature throughout the entire enclosure. In your Ball Python's habitat you can use [under-cage heating mats](#) and overhead ceramic heaters. You can also use [infrared heat bulbs](#) or room heaters to maintain the terrarium temperature at night.

Secondary heat sources are used to create hot spots in the cage, such as the basking area, and for this, you should use a 75 watt or lower [incandescent light bulb](#) with a [reflector](#). These should only be placed at the end of the enclosure used for the basking area.

Avoid using heat rocks as a heat source, as they will burn your Ball Python when he rubs against or touches them.

Light

Ball Pythons require a basic 12 hour light / 12 hour dark photoperiod. "Daylight" periods should be increased to 14 hours in the summer and decreased to 12 hours in the winter. Changes between seasons should be made gradually to mimic the natural shortening and lengthening of the days.

Full spectrum lighting isn't required, because ball pythons are nocturnal and obtain Vitamin D3 from their diet. Use [daylight or full-spectrum fluorescent lights](#) with low wattages during the day. No nighttime lights are necessary, though, as mentioned above, you can use an infrared heat bulb if necessary.

All lights should be outside the enclosure and screened in to prevent injury.

Humidity

Ball Pythons naturally live in a climate with fairly low humidity, so the humidity in their enclosure should be no more than 50% to 60%. When your snake is shedding, you may need to increase the humidity to 65%, or you can provide a humidity retreat box.

Water

Ball Pythons should always have access to a pool of water for drinking and submersing themselves. The pool should be a heavy container your snake cannot knock over, and the water will need to be changed daily, as Ball Pythons often defecate in their water.

Cleaning

A proper cleaning schedule is important to maintain your Ball Python's health. Every day you should replace soiled substrate and change the water. You will also need to clean and disinfect the entire enclosure as needed, usually about once every one to two weeks. To do this, you can use a 5% bleach solution or a product like Nolvasan. Be sure to rinse everything thoroughly after cleaning it, and always wash your hands after handling your snake or anything in the enclosure.

Housing More Than One Ball Python

If you have the room, you can house two Ball Pythons together. You will need a significantly bigger enclosure as well as more hide spots throughout it. The two Ball Pythons must be approximately the same size when housed together, and the new one must be quarantined until you are sure that he or she is not carrying any diseases. You will most likely have to feed them in two separate enclosures, and there is always a chance that they will not eat if housed together, so be sure to have an extra enclosure handy in case you need to house them separately.