

Garter Snake

There are approximately 75 species of garter snakes and are best kept by people with some experience of keeping snakes. Garters are a diurnal species of snake that are often very active. They may be temperamental at times and are very quick paced. They are not dangerous and can be very rewarding pets when cared for correctly. Their pattern varies across species which is often 1, 2 or 3 stripes or a checkered pattern. Their average life span is between 6–10 years in captivity. Snakes are best housed alone as company can be stressful. Low night time temperatures can cause snakes to hibernate.

Please check species availability.



Glossary

- Reptile** – A cold-blooded vertebrate with scaly skin.
- Amphibian** – A cold-blooded vertebrate that begins life as an aquatic animal and grows into a terrestrial adult with lungs.
- Terrestrial** – A ground dwelling animal.
- Arboreal** – An animal that lives in trees.
- Diurnal** – Awake in the day.
- Nocturnal** – Awake during the night.
- UVB** – Ultraviolet radiation.
- Colubrid** – A family of snakes.
- Hybrid** – Offspring from animals of different species.
- Morph** – Colourations created due to genetics.
- Musk** – Unpleasant odour released when an animal is stressed or feels threatened.

Live plants are only available on special order

If you require any further information, please ask our pet care advisors who will be very happy to help.

Opening Times

Monday – Saturday: 9am – 6pm
Sunday: 9.30am – 4pm

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Care & Advice Sheet

Inspiration for your Home & Garden

Size & Housing

These snakes are not large bodied and do not get excessively long. They rarely exceed lengths of 4ft but are more likely to reach 2-3ft. Females will grow larger than males. They are best housed in wooden vivariums as they maintain the heat better than glass terrariums. We recommend:

3ft x 2ft x 1.5ft – Minimum for 1 Adult



Handling

Garter snakes can be cage defensive and be difficult to catch. Once outside of their enclosure they will calm down but will still move quickly. Always support the body with both hands and avoid grabbing them near the head. They do not constrict and will not hang on to you the same way other snakes will. Be more careful so you do not drop them. If they panic or feel threatened they may thrash about in your hands, bite you or musk on you.

Substrate & Furnishings

Different substrates can be used for garter snakes. For ease of cleaning, newspaper or paper towels can be used but must be changed when soiled. Other substrates include beech chips, corn cob granules or aspen. There should be plenty of places for the snake to hide. Provide hides (such as caves) in at least both sides of the enclosure so they have a hot and a cold hide to allow the snake to regulate their body temperature. With lots of hides in the enclosure the snake is likely to feel more secure. They can be very active snakes and will appreciate branches and ledges. Artificial plants can be used for decoration. Spot pick the enclosure daily and full clean once or twice a month using a reptile specific disinfectant.

Lighting & Temperature

Provide UVB (5%) to aid their metabolism and to create a daytime cycle of 10-12 hours. This is best controlled by a timer. They require a basking area with a temperature around 30°C – this is best achieved by using a heat bulb, ceramic heat emitter with a guard or heat mat controlled by a thermostat at all times. There should be a temperature gradient across the enclosure with a cool end dropping to 22°C minimal. The temperature can fall no lower than 16°C at night.

Food & Water

Fresh water should be provided daily in a large bowl. Humidity should be kept between 40-60% but if the snake has issues shedding, provide a moist hide with moss. Garter snakes should be fed weekly and they may not feed if they are due to shed. In the wild they would eat amphibians, fish and small rodents.

Offer a variety of:

- Mice
- Rats
- Frozen whole fish

Some snakes may have a preference over the food they are offered including type and colour. Be aware that rats are much fatter than mice so it is essential to keep an eye on the overall body condition of your snake. They may go off of their food in colder months.

Defrost the food item for a few hours before feeding and use warm water to warm the rodent up if needed. Tongs should be used to feed the snake as they may miss the food. It is recommended to feed the snake in a separate container.

Do not handle the snake for 24-48 hours after feeding as this can cause the snake to regurgitate the food.