



An adorable snake with a lot of quirks.

The Western hognose snake is an easy to care for and much easier snake to fall in love with given its novel appearance and unique behaviors. Hogs, as they are affectionately called, require little space and are great additions to any apartment dweller or families with children. Due to their more recent popularity, hogs now come in a variety of colors and patterns, and are a great choice for new and experienced reptile enthusiasts alike.

Lifespan

With proper care, these snakes can live into their 20s.

Size

A hardy active snake, with females reaching lengths of little less than 3 feet. Males tend to be smaller, averaging between 12-14 inches in length.

Natural History

The Western hognose snake is a harmless, diurnal colubrid of North America. Its natural range extends from Canada through the central U.S., including Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. It has a stocky build, is covered in keeled scales, and possesses a sharply upturned snout used for digging and hunting. This species is best known for some of its harmless defensive ploys, such as a forceful loud hiss accompanied with a flattened body in an attempt to appear larger and more intimidating to predators, and to roll over and play dead. They do not usually bite but will often repeatedly strike a potential threat with its keeled snout in either a forward or sideways movement.

Housing

The Western hognose snake is a moderately active snake that requires a secure enclosure, even though it is not as adept to escape as other snakes. Hatchlings can be kept in a 5 to 10-gallon tank while adults can be housed in a 20 to 40-gallon tank. This species is primarily a ground-dwelling species so floor space is more important than height when choosing an enclosure. In any case, ensure that lids are secure and that the enclosure allows for adequate ventilation to prevent humidity build up.

Lighting & Heating

To properly thermoregulate, reptiles must be provided with a healthy temperature gradient as is appropriate for each species. For hognose snakes, this ground-dwelling species enjoys temperate conditions.

Provide your hog with a basking spot of 90F and an ambient temperature in the 70sF. Terrarium temperature and humidity control for this species can be managed by using a screened lid, an ultratherm heating pad with thermostatic control, and a ceramic heat emitter and/or basking heat lamps to generate appropriate basking and ambient temperatures. Never use heat rocks as these may burn your snake! Measure temperatures and humidity closely with digital thermometers/hygrometers at both warm and cool ends of the enclosure.

Ultraviolet lighting is a topic that elicits different opinions with regards to snakes. Many reptiles need ultraviolet light, necessary in the absorption and metabolism of calcium and D3, but there is no significant data that would suggest that this species requires it. However, exposure to appropriate wavelengths of UV can provide a day/night

cycle for your snake and display your pet in its best colors. Providing UV is a recommendation but not a necessity for housing this species.

Substrates & Cage Décor



These snakes love to burrow and as such should be provided with substrates that allow for this natural behavior. Suitable substrate choices include shredded aspen, coconut bedding, or newspaper. Cypress mulch works as well, but avoid aromatic woods like pine or cedar. A few inches of substrate should suffice, enough to allow complete coverage of your pet when burrowed.

While they love to burrow, these snakes enjoy exploration. Cork bark flats/rounds/tubes, sterilized woods, rocks, artificial plants, and most commercially available reptile décor is acceptable when setting up their enclosure. Make sure that with the use of heavier décor, such as rocks, woods, and even water bowls, that the décor touches the bottom of the enclosure, this way if your snake decides to burrow beneath it, it is not accidentally crushed. Provide your snake with a hide at both the warm and cool end of the enclosure.

Offer your snake a water bowl, one that is small and shallow enough to allow the occasional drink and not affect humidity levels in the tank. This species rarely experiences shedding problems and does not need to be misted but can be offered a humidity box during shed.

Diet & Nutrition

Snakes are carnivores, meaning they primarily consume rodents and do not eat plants or insects. Feed your snake appropriately sized rodents (preferably frozen/thawed mice), such that prey items are no larger than the widest circumference of the snake. Young hogs can be offered food 5-7 days, while adults can be fed every 10-14 days. As a side note, established hogs are usually eager feeders, but some neonates or hatchlings can be challenging to accept mice. When buying a neonate hog, get one that has eaten 3 or 4 times on its own before purchasing.

Snakes should be fed in a separate enclosure, or a “feed box.” This dissociates your hand from becoming dinner anytime you enter your snake’s enclosure for handling or maintenance and discourages accidental ingestion of loose substrate. Place your snake in its feed box with the thawed mouse. Rodents may be offered off of tongs or simply placed into the box.

Do not handle your snake for at least a day after feeding to reduce the risk of regurgitation. It is not uncommon for healthy hogs to go off of feed occasionally, either due to seasonality or shed. If this happens, continue your husbandry routine as usual and keep handling to a minimum. Try offering your snake food weekly until your snake is interested in eating again. If your snake continues to be disinterested in food in addition to losing weight, then you may need to reevaluate your husbandry and/or schedule a vet appointment.

Handling & Temperament

As a standard, ensure that your snake has acclimated to its new home first before handling. This may take 2 weeks or more. Once your snake has settled and has been observed exploring its enclosure freely and eating consistently, begin handling. It is recommended that you start this process in the tank or in your lap, supporting its whole body with both hands while doing your best to avoid quick movements. Remember, Western hognose snakes may deploy some harmless defense maneuvers when threatened by a potential predator, such as hissing and striking with their keeled snout or playing dead. This is normal. Simply allow your snake the opportunity to relax and become comfortable with the process. With persistence, these snakes can become handable, docile, rewarding pets. That being said, avoid over handling – if your snake appears stressed as indicated by a lack of appetite, consider reducing the frequency of handling sessions until the animal’s behavior has normalized.