

Ball Python Care Guide: Housing

A practical care guide based on real breeding and keeping experience.

Providing the correct housing for your Ball Python is essential for its health and wellbeing. This care guide covers the key aspects of enclosure setup, heating, humidity, substrate, and environmental enrichment to help you create a secure and suitable environment for your snake.

1. Understanding Ball Python Behaviour

Ball Pythons (*Python regius*) are considered **thigmotactic**, meaning they feel most secure when much of their body is in contact with surfaces around them. In the wild they spend much of their time in tight spaces such as rodent burrows, under logs, or between rocks where they feel protected from predators.

Because of this natural behaviour, Ball Pythons tend to move along the edges of their enclosure rather than across open areas, and they prefer environments with plenty of cover and secure hiding places.

Ball Pythons, like all reptiles, are also **poikilothermic**, meaning their body temperature depends on the temperature of their surroundings. They rely on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature and carry out essential bodily functions such as digestion, immune function, and general activity.

Providing an enclosure that allows your Ball Python to feel secure while also offering the correct temperature range is essential for maintaining a healthy snake.

2. Choosing the Right Enclosure

Ball Pythons can be successfully kept in a variety of enclosure types. The most used setups are **vivarium's** and **plastic tub (RUB) systems**, and both can work well when set up correctly.

Vivarium's

Vivarium's can make excellent enclosures for Ball Pythons when designed with the snake's natural behaviour in mind.

When using a vivarium, it is important to ensure:

- The enclosure is **not excessively large or open**
- The space is **well furnished with hides, décor and cover**
- Large empty areas are avoided
- Appropriate **temperature and humidity levels** are maintained

Ball Pythons feel most secure when they have plenty of places to hide and surfaces to move along. Adding multiple hides, décor, and artificial plants can help create a more secure and natural environment.

Humidity levels should also be monitored carefully in vivarium setups. Some heating methods, such as ceramic heat emitters, can dry the air and may require additional humidity management to maintain suitable levels.

When set up correctly, vivarium's can provide a suitable and attractive enclosure for a Ball Python.

Tub and Rack Systems

Plastic tub setups, commonly made using modified storage boxes (often referred to as **RUBs – Really Useful Boxes**), are widely used by breeders and experienced keepers.

Tub systems offer several practical advantages:

- They help maintain **stable temperatures and humidity**
- They provide a **secure and enclosed environment**
- They are easy to clean and maintain
- They are commonly used in **breeding collections**
- They are ideal for **quarantine setups**

Because Ball Pythons naturally prefer tight, enclosed spaces, many individuals settle very well in tub setups and often feed consistently in these environments.

Both vivarium and tub setups can work well when managed correctly. The most important factors are providing **security, appropriate temperatures, correct humidity levels, and suitable hiding places**.

3. Tub Size Guide for Ball Pythons

For keepers using tub setups, choosing the correct size tub for the snake's size helps provide a secure and comfortable environment.

Below is a general size guide commonly used by breeders.



Ball Python Size	Recommended Tub
Hatchling (out of egg – 100g)	3.5L Braplast tub

100g – 250g	5L RUB
250g – 450g	9L RUB
450g – 850g	12L RUB
850g – 2kg	33L RUB
2kg+	50L or 70L RUB (depending on the individual snake)

Every Ball Python is slightly different in temperament and confidence. Some individuals are more sensitive to environmental changes than others.

If a Ball Python is moved into a significantly larger enclosure too quickly it may become stressed and stop feeding. If this happens, returning the snake to the previous enclosure size often resolves the issue.

Once the snake has been feeding consistently for a couple of months, you can attempt to increase enclosure size again.

4. Substrate

There are several suitable substrate options available for Ball Pythons, and the best choice often depends on the keeper's setup and personal preference.

Many keepers choose simple substrates such as **paper towels or card liners**, as they are hygienic, easy to replace, and allow you to monitor the snake's health easily.

Other reptile-safe substrates designed for snakes can also be used when appropriate and may help maintain humidity levels in certain setups.

Quarantine Substrate

When introducing a new Ball Python, it is strongly recommended to use a simple substrate such as **paper towels** during the quarantine period. This allows droppings and other potential issues to be easily monitored.

New snakes should ideally be quarantined for **around four months** and kept separately from any existing reptiles wherever possible.

Substrates to Avoid

Certain substrates should always be avoided when keeping Ball Pythons.

Substrates containing **cedar or other aromatic woods** should never be used, as the oils can be harmful to reptiles. Very dusty substrates, sand, or loose bedding that

can easily be ingested during feeding should also be avoided, as they may cause health issues.

5. Heating Your Enclosure

Providing correct temperatures is essential for maintaining a healthy Ball Python.

One commonly used heating method is a **heat mat**, which should always be connected to a **thermostat**. A thermostat regulates the temperature and prevents overheating, which could otherwise result in burns.

Heat mats should be placed **outside the enclosure**, underneath the tub or enclosure, rather than inside where the snake could come into direct contact with it.

For vivarium setups, other heating options may also be used, such as ceramic heat emitters. These should always be installed safely, used with the correct guards, and controlled with an appropriate thermostat.

Monitoring Temperatures

Accurate temperature monitoring is extremely important.

A **handheld infrared temperature gun** is one of the easiest ways to check surface temperatures quickly and accurately. This allows you to confirm that temperatures inside the enclosure match the thermostat settings.

Ball Pythons require a **temperature gradient** so they can regulate their body temperature.

Typical temperature ranges are:

Hot spot: **32–34°C**

Cool end: **26–27°C**

This temperature gradient allows the snake to move between warmer and cooler areas depending on its needs.

Lighting is not essential for Ball Pythons. The natural light cycle of the room is usually sufficient, and continuous bright overhead lighting can be stressful for snakes.

6. Essential Enclosure Items

Ball Pythons are secretive animals and require secure places to hide in order to feel safe.

Each enclosure should contain at least **two appropriately sized hides**:

- one on the **warm side**
- one on the **cool side**

This allows the snake to regulate its body temperature without sacrificing security.

The hide should be only slightly larger than the snake so that it feels snug and secure.

A suitably sized **water bowl** should always be available with fresh water. The bowl should be large enough for the snake to soak in if it chooses to do so, which some Ball Pythons will occasionally do, particularly when preparing to shed.

Fresh water should be provided daily, and the bowl should be cleaned regularly.

7. Humidity

Ball Pythons require humidity levels of approximately **50–60%** during normal conditions.

When a Ball Python is preparing to shed its skin, humidity should be temporarily increased to **around 80-90%** to assist with the shedding process.

Common signs that a Ball Python is entering the shedding cycle include:

- cloudy or milky eyes
- a pinkish belly
- dull or faded colours

The eyes will usually clear shortly before the snake sheds. Even when the eyes clear, the increased humidity should be maintained, as the shed typically occurs within the following **1–2 days**.

A healthy Ball Python should shed its skin **in one complete piece**.

For information on feeding your snake, read our **Ball Python Feeding Guide**.