

Ball Python Setup Guide: A Beginner Checklist

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

Preparing the correct setup for your Ball Python before bringing it home is one of the most important steps in successful snake keeping. A well-prepared environment will help your snake settle in quickly, reduce stress, and encourage consistent feeding.

This guide walks you through the essential equipment and steps needed when setting up your Ball Python enclosure, as well as what to do during the first few days after bringing your snake home.

1. Settling in period

When you first bring your Ball Python home, it is important to allow the snake time to settle into its new environment without unnecessary disturbance.

If you already keep other reptiles, the new snake should be **quarantined in a separate room** wherever possible. This helps reduce the risk of spreading any potential parasites or illnesses.

For the first **three full days after bringing your snake home**, handling should be avoided. Allow the snake to explore its enclosure and become comfortable in its new surroundings.

The only time minimal interaction may be necessary during this period is if something in the enclosure needs urgent attention, such as replacing dirty substrate or refilling the water bowl.

After the snake has had time to settle, the first feed can usually be attempted.

2. First Feeding

The first feed is usually best attempted on the **third evening after bringing your snake home**.

Ball Pythons are naturally more active in the evening and at night, which is often the best time to offer food.

Using the **steaming method** to warm the rodent can help stimulate a feeding response. This involves warming the head of the rodent using steam from a kettle so the snake can detect both the heat and scent of the prey.

Once the snake has taken its first meal, it should be left undisturbed for **around 36–48 hours** to allow time for digestion.

Handling too soon after feeding can cause stress and may lead to regurgitation.

3. Beginning Handling

Once the snake has digested its first meal, handling can begin gradually.

Start with **short handling sessions of around 10 minutes**.

You will often be able to tell whether your snake is comfortable by how its body feels:

A relaxed snake will feel **soft and loose**, with regular tongue flicking as it explores its surroundings.

A stressed snake will usually feel **tense and rigid**, which is a sign that handling should be kept short or stopped for that session.

Over the next **two to three weeks**, handling time can be gradually increased by around **five minutes at a time** as the snake becomes more comfortable.

This gradual approach allows both you and your snake to build confidence and trust.

4. Enclosure

Choosing the right enclosure is essential for providing a secure and comfortable environment.

Ball Pythons can be successfully kept in **vivarium's or tub setups**, provided they are set up correctly.

The enclosure should:

- Provide enough space for the snake to move comfortably
- Contain multiple hides and décor for security
- Maintain stable temperature and humidity levels
- Avoid large empty areas that may make the snake feel exposed

More detailed information can be found in the **Ball Python Housing Care Guide**.

5. Heating

Ball Pythons rely on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature.

A heat source such as a **heat mat** is commonly used and must always be controlled using a **thermostat** to prevent overheating.

Ball Pythons require a temperature gradient within their enclosure so they can move between warmer and cooler areas.

Typical temperature ranges are:

Hot spot: **32–34°C**

Cool end: **26–27°C**

Using an **infrared temperature gun** is one of the easiest ways to accurately monitor enclosure temperatures.

6. Substrate

There are several suitable substrate options available for Ball Pythons.

Many keepers prefer simple substrates such as **paper towels or card liners**, which are easy to keep clean and allow close monitoring of the snake's health.

Other reptile-safe substrates designed for snakes may also be used depending on the enclosure setup and keeper preference.

Substrates containing **cedar or aromatic woods** should never be used as the oils can be harmful to reptiles.

7. Hides

Ball Pythons are naturally secretive snakes and require secure hiding places to feel safe.

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

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

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

Providing secure hides greatly reduces stress and often improves feeding behaviour.

8. Water Bowl

A suitably sized **water bowl** should always be available in the enclosure with fresh drinking water.

The bowl should be large enough for the snake to soak in if it chooses to do so. Some Ball Pythons will occasionally soak, particularly when preparing to shed.

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

9. Feeding equipment

Using feeding equipment helps keep both you and your snake safe during feeding.

Recommended equipment includes:

- Feeding tongs or tweezers
- An electric kettle for the steaming method
- Frozen rodents of the appropriate size

Using feeding tongs prevents the snake from accidentally striking your hand during feeding and allows you to safely present the prey item.

More detailed feeding guidance can be found in the **Ball Python Feeding Guide**.

10. Ball Python Setup Checklist

Before bringing your snake home, make sure you have the following items ready:

- Enclosure (vivarium or tub setup)

- Heat source
- Thermostat
- Temperature gun
- Substrate
- Two hides
- Water bowl
- Feeding tongs
- Frozen rodents

Having everything prepared before your snake arrives will make the settling-in process much smoother for both you and your new Ball Python.

11. Common Beginner Mistakes When Keeping Ball Pythons

Ball pythons are generally hardy snakes when kept correctly, but many common problems arise from simple beginner mistakes. Being aware of these issues will help your snake settle in properly and thrive in its new home.

1. Not Gathering Information from the Breeder or Shop

Before bringing your ball python home, it is important to gather as much information as possible from the breeder or reptile shop you are purchasing from. Many new keepers overlook this step, which can lead to unnecessary stress for the snake and feeding issues during the first few weeks.

You should always ask for key details about the snake's current care, including:

- What the snake is currently eating (mouse, multi or rat, and the size of the prey)
- Whether the prey is frozen-thawed or live
- How frequently the snake is fed
- The snake's age and current weight
- The size and type of enclosure or tub it has previously been kept in

Having this information allows you to closely replicate the environment and routine the snake is already used to when it first arrives in its new home.

Ball pythons can be sensitive to change, and introducing too many differences at once (such as a completely different enclosure, different prey type, or altered temperatures) can cause unnecessary stress and may result in the snake refusing food. Replicating the snake's previous setup as closely as possible during the settling-in period will help it adjust more smoothly.

2. Handling the Snake Too Soon

New owners are often eager to handle their snake straight away. However, ball pythons should be given time to settle into their new environment before regular handling begins. Handling too soon can cause unnecessary stress and may interfere with feeding.

It is best to allow the snake a few days to settle and ensure it has taken its first meal successfully before handling regularly.

3. Incorrect Temperatures

Temperature is one of the most important aspects of ball python care. Enclosures should provide a warm side and a cooler side so the snake can regulate its body temperature naturally.

If temperatures are too low or inconsistent, ball pythons may struggle to digest their food properly and can become stressed or unwell. Always use a reliable thermostat and thermometers to monitor enclosure temperatures.

4. Enclosures That Are Too Large or Too Exposed

While it may seem beneficial to place a young ball python straight into a very large enclosure, this can sometimes cause stress if the snake feels too exposed.

Young ball pythons often feel more secure in smaller, well-covered environments with multiple hides. Providing snug hides and appropriate enclosure size helps the snake feel safe and reduces stress.

5. Waiting Too Long Before Offering the First Feed

After bringing a new ball python home, it is important to allow it a short settling period before offering food. A good guideline is to wait around **three days** before attempting the first feed.

Waiting too long before offering food can sometimes lead to unnecessary feeding delays, particularly if the snake had already gone several days without eating before arriving with you. In some cases, this can contribute to the development of poor feeding patterns.

Offering a meal after a short settling period allows the snake to establish a feeding routine in its new environment.

6. Overhandling

Although ball pythons are generally calm and tolerant snakes, excessive handling can cause stress. Handling should always be moderate, especially during the first few weeks after arrival.

Snakes should also never be handled for at least **48 hours after feeding**, as this can interrupt digestion and may cause the snake to regurgitate its meal.

By avoiding these common mistakes and ensuring the enclosure setup and routine are correct from the beginning, most ball pythons will settle quickly and become excellent long-term pets.