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Burmese Python Care

Basic Information

The Burmese Python, *Python molurus bivittatus*, is one of the giant pythons and is native to areas of Southeast Asia, such as China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Burma. It can live up to 25 years and can exceed 20 feet in length and 200 pounds in weight.

The Burmese Python is a diurnal rainforest dweller and is equally at home on the ground, in trees, or in water. The morning hours are generally spent basking in the sun to increase their body temperature. Then they hunt during the middle of the day. After eating, the focus becomes keeping warm and digesting their food. Generally they will not eat daily, or even weekly. They enjoy a wide variety of prey, including other reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

Before investing in a Burmese Python, you should understand that the cute little snake that you can buy in the store today can exceed 10 feet and 40 pounds in 2 years, and require full grown rabbits and chickens for its weekly feedings. If you are thinking of passing it on when you can no longer handle it, keep in mind that it is difficult to find homes for full-grown Burmese pythons. If you are planning to move in the near future, you should also consider state, county, and local regulations regarding the ownership of any large constrictors. If you are still determined to own a Burmese python, then you need to make a number of preparations to keep your new pet as healthy as possible.

Housing:

You should always plan ahead; as it is pointless buying or making an enclosure that will be too small for your pet in a few months. Your snake should always be able to stretch out fully in its enclosure, and the enclosure should be secure enough to prevent any surprise escapes. Be careful with the use of screens and other abrasive transparent surfaces, as snakes have a habit of rubbing their noses against these kinds of surfaces. A 55-gallon tank, or a similar size enclosure, is generally adequate size for the first 6 months to a year.

Temperature, Humidity, and Lighting:

Temperature is very important to snakes as they are ectotherms (cold-blooded), and hence lack the ability to internally regulate their own body temperature. The enclosure should be organized to allow your snake a choice of temperatures so that it can regulate its temperature by choosing the appropriate spot. During the daytime, the cooler end of the tank should be 78 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, the warmer end 88 degrees with a basking spot of 90



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degrees. At night, the cage should be allowed to cool, but should not fall below 78-80 degrees. The heat can be provided by a number of sources – heating pads, heating rocks, lights or ceramic heat emitters. However, care should be taken to guarantee that your snake will not burn itself on any of the heat sources. Two thermometers will be needed to monitor the temperature accurately; one should be placed at the cooler end, the other at the warm end, and both near to the substrate.

Burmese Pythons do not require any special lighting but should be allowed 12 – 14 hours of darkness daily. Extended periods of light more than 10 -12 hours can be very stressful for your snake.

In the wild, Burmese pythons are found in a humid environment, and if adequate humidity (40- 70 %) is not supplied in captivity, problems such as difficulty shedding and respiratory disease can develop. The presence of a water bowl in the cage is often enough, but if necessary, additional humidity can be provided by misting the cage lightly with water or by keeping the water bowl closer to one of the heat sources. Your snake should always have an adequate supply of water available and it should be provided in a container large enough for it to immerse itself. Your snake will not only use this to drink, but will also completely immerse itself in it and defecate in it. The water will therefore need to be changed almost daily.

Substrate and Decorations:

Your choice of substrate should be determined by aesthetical pleasantness, ease of cleaning, and the health of your snake. Though attractive, wood shavings, chips, or bark can lead to intestinal obstruction if ingested. So, if this is your substrate, your snake should be fed in another container. Though unattractive, newspaper is cheap and can be replaced easily when soiled. Astroturf and carpeting can be easily cleaned, but be sure to have replacement pieces available to use so that adequate time is available for proper disinfecting.

Your snake will require a hidebox, which can be made of any sort of opaque material. Cardboard boxes, sweater boxes, garbage cans, and upside down litterpans are all suitable, as long as your snake is able to enter and leave easily and can comfortably fit underneath or inside.

In addition to the hidebox and the substrate, you should place some branches and rocks in the cage. This will supply your snake with rough surfaces on which to rub on, to aid in shedding. This will also allow some vertical movement. Remember that in the wild they also are found in trees.



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Diet:

Burmese pythons are generally voracious eaters, and it is easy to over feed them and end up with an obese snake. A good rule of thumb to use when deciding what to feed your snake is that it should not be fed anything that is wider than the widest part of its body. The feeding of a prey too large will result in the regurgitation of the meal in a few days. All food provided should be healthy and clean, and you should avoid feeding live prey. The use of wild prey should also be avoided because of the risks of introducing parasites and bacteria to your pet. Plan on initially feeding your snake weekly, and eventually feeding every other week or less.

Notes:

Now that you have your pet all set up, your plan should be to keep it as healthy as possible.

The enclosure will need to be kept free of waste material, and you should plan on cleaning the enclosure thoroughly every 2-3 weeks with a weak solution of bleach. Products such as Lysol and Pinesol as well as any phenol-based product should be avoided as they can be toxic to your snake. The substrate should be completely replaced or cleaned as well. Whatever you clean with, be sure to rinse thoroughly afterwards with water.

You should plan on taking your snake to a veterinarian that treats snakes, so that it can be examined for any external parasites and have a fecal done.

Please be a responsible reptile owner. At 10 feet long, a Burmese python should be considered potentially dangerous, but with some care and precautions the risks can be minimized. All enclosures should be secure. Larger snakes should not be handled when you are alone. Snakes should not be allowed to roam unsupervised or be wrapped around the neck of any individual, young or old.