

# Gopher Snake

All Reptiles, all the time.



## Introduction

Gopher Snakes (*Pituophis catenifer*) are medium sized, non venomous colubrid snakes known for their adaptability and charismatic personalities. They have striking patterns and are known for their ability to mimic rattlesnakes when threatened.

**Care sheets are only to be taken as guidelines.** Just as with all animals, each reptile will have unique traits & personalities special to the individual animal that may require adaptation in their husbandry & care. The following care sheet will address basic requirements but as the primary caretaker of your pet, we encourage you to take notice of your pet's behaviours and preferences and make adjustments as they grow with you & your family. Please also keep in mind that unlike mammals, most reptiles change their behaviour according to seasonal weather changes even if you keep them indoors all year round. Most reptiles also change their behaviour according to their life stages and should not be expected to behave the same their whole life.



### CHEAT SHEET

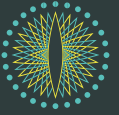
## Gopher Snake

COMMON NAME	Gopher Snake
SCIENTIFIC NAME	<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>
NATURAL LOCATION	Canada, United States, Mexico
HABITAT (WILD)	Widespread deserts, forests, grasslands, and agricultural areas
CAPTIVE ENCLOSURE	15-20gal for hatchlings/juveniles, 40gal+ for adults
SUBSTRATE	Aspen, Cypress Mulch, Loose Bark, Rock/Clay/Sand mixture
TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE	Nighttime: 68-75°F (20-24°C), Cooler: 72-78°F (22-26°C),
BASKING TEMPERATURE	82-88°F (28-31°C)
UVB LIGHTING	Optional. Beneficial in moderate amounts
HUMIDITY	Approx. 30%-50%
AVERAGE ADULT SIZE	4-6 feet
CAPTIVE LIFESPAN	20-30 years
FUN FACT	Commonly venture into suburban garages and sheds seeking refuge



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## Housing

**Enclosure:** Adult Gopher Snake require a spacious enclosure to accommodate their high activity levels. A minimum of a 40gal enclosure is recommended for a single adult, but larger is always better. Ensure the enclosure is escape proof, as these snakes are strong and curious.

**Substrate:** Choose a substrate that encourages burrowing and retains moisture without being overly damp, such as cypress mulch, coconut husk, or reptile bark bedding. You can also use aspen shavings if you are able to provide adequate air humidity. Advanced setups can use a rock, clay, and sand mixture. This species loves to burrow and dig so provide a nice deep substrate to allow this behaviour to transpire.

**Heating:** Maintain a thermal gradient within the enclosure, with a warm side temperature of 85-90°F (30-32°C) and a cool side temperature of 70-75°F (21-24°C). Night time temps can drop to 65-70°F (18-21°C). For smaller enclosures, we recommend using heat pads but this will likely not be sufficient for larger enclosures. Overhead heat such as heat lights, emitters, and radiant heat are all excellent choices to heat your Gopher Snake habitat. Overhead heat will continuously dry your terrarium so ensure you provide humid for hydration.

**Hide spots:** One hide spot is often enough but the more the merrier! If only offering one, ensure that it is situated on the warm side. If you have the space, at least two is ideal, one on the warm side and one on the cool side of the enclosure — to allow your Gopher Snake to thermo-regulate and feel secure. Half logs, cork bark, and commercially available hides are suitable options. You may also want to turn your cool side hide into a humid cave.

**Humidity:** Gopher Snakes prefer low to moderate humidity level of 30-50%. They can tolerate low humidity very well but will eventually need to retreat to higher humidity cave or burrow structures. Ensure proper ventilation in the enclosure to prevent excessive moisture. A humidity box filled with damp sphagnum moss can be added, especially during shedding, to help maintain proper hydration.



## Diet

**Feeding:** Gopher Snakes are carnivores and primarily prey on rodents, small birds, frogs, lizards, and eggs. In captivity, a staple diet of mice and rats is sufficient and easy to obtain. Hatchlings should be fed fuzzie mice every 5-7 days, while sub adults and adults can be fed appropriately sized rats every 7-10 days. Prey items should be no wider than the thickest part of the snake's body. Gopher Snakes have a fast metabolism and over time you will notice that they become very restless when they are hungry. As they age, their feeding frequency typically decreases, with very mature Gopher Snakes (over 15 years old) often eating only once every 2-3 weeks, provided the meal

is appropriately sized. There is strong debate over feeding live versus frozen thawed and there are pros and cons to both. Nutritionally, one is not better than the other assuming you have acquired your feed from a healthy source. Never leave a live rodent unsupervised with your snake and never leave an uneaten frozen/thawed rodent to decompose overnight. To read more about feeding live versus frozen/thawed, please refer to Karen's Corner.

**Water:** Provide a water dish filled with fresh, clean water at all times. Ensure the water dish is large enough for your Gopher Snake to soak in if desired.



## Health & Maintenance

**Hygiene:** Your Gopher Snake will relieve itself once every 5-7 days on average. Over time, you will learn your snake's bathroom routines. Look out for it regularly and remove all excrements as soon as you see it to prevent the buildup of bacteria and parasites. Remove excrements, shed skin, and uneaten prey items promptly. We recommend a full substrate change once per season, 4 times a year, for smaller setups. For larger setups, a full change once per year is enough as long as you maintain spot cleaning daily or weekly. Wood and plant décor can be washed monthly with hot water and dish soap and put back into place.

**Handling:** Gopher Snakes are generally docile in captivity, though they may display defensive behaviors when threatened, such as hissing, puffing up, and tail rattling. These behaviors are typically bluffing and decrease with regular, gentle handling. Handle them confidently but carefully, avoiding sudden movements. Avoid handling during the shedding process and after feeding to minimize stress. Wash your hands before and after handling to prevent the spread of bacteria. Consistent handling will help build trust over time.

**Behavioural Observation:** Gopher Snakes are inquisitive, active, and alert snakes. They are known for their large size, bright colouration, and defensive displays, which can resemble rattlesnakes. In captivity, they are active burrowers and climbers, often exploring their enclosure. Observing their behaviour, from digging to basking, can be highly rewarding for keepers. They provide keepers utmost delight observing them and can be highly rewarding and provides insight into their unique personalities. Monitor your Gopher Snake's behaviour for signs of illness or stress, such as decreased appetite, lethargy, or abnormal shedding. A healthy and well fed Gopher Snake will always have strong muscle tissue and holds itself up well at all times.

**Quarantine:** Quarantine any new additions to your reptile collection to prevent the spread of diseases.