

# ***Large Boa Constrictor***

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Although many boas can get large, up to 14 feet, they are still a nice size for someone who wants a large, but usually not too hard to handle, snake. Boas generally have a nice temperament, which is good for a snake that can get as big around as your thigh! They come in a large range of colors and patterns that can be very beautiful. And snakes are very quiet, clean, undemanding, and they don't need to be taken for a walk on a rainy night!

## **General Diet:**

Snakes are carnivores which means they eat meat. Smaller boas can eat mice, and as they grow they will need to eat rats and then larger prey items. Some willingly will eat frozen prey such as mice that are available commercially. The prey size should be the correct size for the snake and never too big.

## **Vitamins/Supplements:**

Reptiles need to have a vitamin/mineral supplement that contains calcium and phosphorous to keep them healthy. This supplement should be sprinkled on the adult's food items at every second to third feeding and sometimes more often with very young reptiles. We will be glad to explain how often to feed and give supplements to your new pet.

## **Important Food Tips:**

It is best to feed your snake in a place that is not its normal home, such as a large, deep tray. That way the snake will not associate its home as a place that it could be fed. If frozen food is used, it must be thawed out first and at room temperature before it is fed. Never feed a snake anything cold. If live food is fed, watch the snake and prey item carefully. If the snake doesn't seem hungry, take the prey item away, as they will sometimes hurt the snake. You can also put the item in tongs and tease the snake with the prey to see if it wants to eat. Never hold the prey item with your fingers! If it still does not want to eat try later, in a day or so, and be sure the habitat is not too cold.

## **Housing:**

Boas can get very large, so start with a 20-30 gallon sized tank for a young snake. As they grow larger, they will need a larger container. A full cover should be used on top of a tank with clamps. The habitat will also need two types of lighting systems, which may be built into the cover. One type of lighting has a reptile fluorescent bulb that gives off full spectrum light including UVA and UVB. The UVB is considered important for these snakes from tropical climates so they can absorb calcium properly and stay healthy. The second light system is for heat. Reptiles are ectotherms, which means they get their heat from an outside source, unlike humans who can make their own heat.

Different areas of the habitat should be at different temperatures, so reptiles can move around to heat up or cool off. Boas are comfortable with a daytime temperature in their habitat of 84-88 degrees, and a nighttime temperature of 70-80. Use a ceramic reflector or daylight heat bulb in a heat lamp during the day to keep the temperature up in their habitat. If the place you live gets too cold at night, use a lower wattage heat emitter or nighttime bulb (which does not give off much light) to keep the temperature correct. Do not use hot rocks with boas.

Boas like high humidity, so mist the habitat daily if needed. Large water containers help keep humidity up, and boas like to bathe sometimes, so a water bowl or tray large enough for them to get in and out of easily should be offered constantly. Some branches, vines, or other decorations that they can climb should be used in the habitat. Do not use any branches from outside, or you might be introducing pesticides or diseases into the tank. Use the appropriate reptile litter or substrate on the bottom. Boas like to have a place to hide so provide some sort of cave or hiding spot.

### **Sanitation/General Care:**

Change the water as needed, usually three to five times a week. The litter or substrate used on the bottom should be cleaned as often as needed, and this will depend on habitat size and your pet's size. We will be happy to recommend how often your set up should be cleaned out.

### **General Maintenance:**

Mist the habitat once daily if needed, depending on how dry the air is in your area and time of year. Reptiles will shed their skin periodically and this is normal. Mist them lightly at these times to help them shed the skin more easily, and be sure a large water container is available. Be sure the habitat is at the right temperature at all times, as a chilled reptile will not eat well or at all and may get sick. Change the reptile full spectrum light as often as recommended by the manufacturer, usually every six months to a year. Although the bulb may still be working, it will lose its potency over a certain period of time and, for example, may not be giving off enough UVB to be effective for calcium absorption and health.

### **Health Care:**

Boas are generally very hardy and healthy when kept in the right conditions. Have them checked by a reptile veterinarian only if needed due to sickness or injury.

### **Special Section - Handling Precaution:**

Reptiles can carry one disease that can be transmitted to people called salmonellosis. This disease is usually caught by people after they eat undercooked eggs or meat, but reptiles can give it to people as well. Although it is rare for a reptile to carry this disease, it is always important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have handled your pet or anything in your pet's cage. Keep your pet out of the kitchen area and do not allow very small children to handle any reptiles. Taking just a few precautions will keep the chances of catching this disease to an absolute minimum.

### **Supplies checklist:**

Fluorescent light with reptile UVB bulb	Large water dish or tray
Heat lamp with heat emitter or daylight heat bulb	Reptile litter or other substrate
2nd heat lamp with lower wattage emitter or night bulb	Fish tank with full hood
Branches or other decorations for climbing & hiding	Vitamin/mineral supplement
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