

Garter Snake

Garter snakes make great pets as they only get about 3-4 feet long and do not require a lot of care. They are lovely snakes, usually black or deep brown with very colorful stripes or a checkerboard pattern that goes the full length of their long, thin body. They tame up very easily and can be a lot of fun to watch fishing for their favorite meal.

General Diet:

Snakes are carnivores, which means they eat meat. Garter snakes mainly eat fish, frogs, newts, and small mammals in the wild. In captivity, they can eat feeder goldfish and pinkie mice, and some willingly will eat frozen pinkie 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 with calcium and phosphorous. 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:

Small feeder goldfish can be fed from tongs or placed in a water bowl inside the snake's habitat and then the snake can fish for them (which is pretty funny to watch as the snake is quite blind when its head is under the water!). If frozen pinkie mice are fed, they must be thawed out first and at room temperature before they are fed. Never feed a snake anything cold. Be sure the snake likes pinkies and is hungry if live ones are to be fed, as pinkies won't live very long.

Housing:

Garter snakes stay small, so a 15-20 gallon tank will work well. A full cover should be used on top of a tank with clamps. The habitat will also need a light that is used specifically to heat a tank if the area the tank is kept in is not warm enough. 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. Garter snakes are comfortable with a daytime temperature in their habitat of 75-80 degrees, and a nighttime temperature of 65-75.

Use a low wattage daylight heat bulb in a heat lamp during the day to keep the temperature up in their habitat. If the place you live gets very cold at night, use a lower wattage nighttime bulb (which does not give off much light) to keep the temperature correct. Do not use hot rocks with Garter snakes.

Garter snakes like some humidity, which a shallow water dish can provide. The water dish should be large enough for them to get in and out of easily and should be offered constantly. Some low branches that they may climb can be used in the habitat. Do not use any branches from outside, or you might be introducing pesticides or diseases. Use the appropriate reptile litter or substrate on the bottom. Garter snakes also like a cave to hide in, especially at night.

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.

General Maintenance:

Reptiles will shed their skin periodically and this is normal. Be sure a clean water bowl is available constantly. Make sure the habitat is always at the right temperature.

Health Care:

Garter snakes 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. 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.

Supplies checklist:

- Fish tank with full glass cover
- Heat lamp with daylight heat bulb (if needed)
- 2nd heat lamp with night bulb (if needed)
- Large water dish
- Reptile litter or other substrate
- Branches and other decorations for climbing
- Reptile cave or hideout
- Vitamin/mineral supplement
- Books about Garter Snakes

