

Housing your Ball Python

Guidance from Ashlie's Living Art Ball Python's

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1. Understanding Ball Python behaviour...

Ball Pythons are considered to be thigmotactic meaning they keep large areas of their bodies in contact with surfaces of the environment in order to feel safe, limiting how much of it is exposed to open space and therefore predators.

This thigmotactic behaviour drives Ball Pythons to seek out small hide spots to squeeze into, such as under logs and rocks, and move along their enclosure decorations rather than open floor.

Ball Pythons along with all reptiles are poikilothermic, meaning their body temperature varies with the temperature of their surroundings, and therefore require a heat source to enable them to carry out bodily functions such as digestion and immune function.

2. Best enclosures for Ball Pythons....

Most vivarium's are made of glass, which although look nice are actually a very poor material for the conduction of heat and insulation which is a huge concern voiced by scientific recommendations (Orlando Diaz-Figueroa, 'Basic husbandry and nutrition of snakes' (2008)) and can not only lead to unstable environmental temperatures, but also forces a thigmotactic snake, moving along the boundaries of a glass vivarium, to inevitably come into contact with a cold surface. This is reduced in vivarium's which are partially made from wood/melamine or other materials, however most still rely on glass for at least one side of the enclosure.

Whereas in contrast, enclosures made from plastic tubs, such as modified storage boxes (e.g. RUBs) provide not only a stable internal temperature but also are an insulating material for thigmotactic snakes to move along. This not only provides a constant ambient temperature for body function, but also prevents the snake cooling quickly whilst exploring the edges of the enclosure. Good well deigned Racks using modified storage boxes give that feeling of security and usually provide better conditions by way of heating and humidity levels therefore enabling your snake to thrive.

A scientific review was written by Insectivore [online, 2011-2017] regarding keeping snakes in particular, Ball pythons in plastic boxes. This review discusses the advantages and disadvantages of keeping snakes in plastic storage box style enclosures compared to vivarium's drawing on several scientific works involving snakes in captivity. This is a must read.

<http://www.insectivore.co.uk/articles-snakes-plastic-storage-housing.html>

3. Size guide for RUBs for your Ball Python....

If you are keeping more than 1 ball python I would recommend using a racking system which adds to the feel of security for ball pythons as they are enclosed, only open at one side.

If you are only keeping a small number of ball pythons and do not want a rack system then I recommend using a RUB set up.

RUB size guide:

Hatchling ball python straight out of the egg up to 150g: 3.5 Litre Braplast tub



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<https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Braplast-3-0L-Vented-Plastic-Box-Hatching-Reptile-Tub/131109790857?hash=item1e86c0a489:m:meWnYg1GZa29cizRV1I7aNw>

Hatchling ball python 150g - 350g: 5 Litre Rub



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https://rover.ebay.com/rover/1/710-53481-19255-0/1?icep_id=114&ipn=icep&toolid=20004&campid=5338264619&mpre=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ebay.co.uk%2Fit

[m%2FREALLY-USEFUL-BOXES-GENUINE-ITEM-VARIOUS-SIZES-QUANTITIES-FREE-P-P%2F152467445665%3Fhash%3Ditem237fc497a1%3Am%3AmwF8pp-pOrRI4V9usJ6g8LA](https://rover.ebay.com/rover/1/710-53481-19255-0/1?icep_id=114&ipn=icep&toolid=20004&campid=5338264619&mpre=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ebay.co.uk%2Fitem%2F152467445665%3Fhash%3Ditem237fc497a1%3Am%3AmwF8pp-pOrRI4V9usJ6g8LA)

350g – 550g ball python: 9 Litre RUB



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550g – 1kg ball python: 12 Litre RUB



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1kg – 2.5kg adult ball python: 33 Litre RUB



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2.5kg plus ball python: 50 or 70 Litre RUB depending upon length and confidence.



50 Litre RUB Click the link to take you straight to this item on eBay

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70 litre RUB Click the link to take you straight to this item on eBay

https://rover.ebay.com/rover/1/710-53481-19255-0/1?icep_id=114&ipn=icep&toolid=20004&campid=5338264619&mpre=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ebay.co.uk%2Fitem%2FReally-Useful-Boxes-Heavy-Duty-Stackable-Storage-Box-35-84-Litre-Size%2F331648394346%3Fhash%3Ditem4d37c8e46a%3Am%3AmfYu-pi_LFf1rhTAPk4--0g

Some Royals are more confident than others, however most are sensitive to change and can stop eating if moved up sizes too quickly or placed in an environment which is too large.

4. Ball Python Substrate.....

I keep my Ball Pythons on newspapers and paper towels, this is the easiest and safest substrate for ball pythons with regards to cleaning and can also show more easily if there are any issues with the snake. For example when purchasing a new snake, I find it best to place in my isolation rack on paper towels as this easily shows any issues such as mites whereas on other types of bedding this could easily be missed and therefore go untreated for some time and also place the rest of your collection at risk if the snake is then moved into, for example a rack with your other snakes.



I recommend placing any new snake into an isolation rack or RUB in a separate room where possible, to any other snakes for a four month period. This provides adequate time for any signs of ill health to be seen and therefore you are not placing your other snakes at any risk of a possible infection or infestation.

It is important to be very careful in selecting other substrates than paper. Some substrates such as bark, is not only unsafe but can carry mites. Substrate containing Cedar should never be used as it contains oils which can be deadly to reptiles. Substrates such as sand, shavings and other loose substrates are not ideal as your Ball Python can swallow the substrate or get in stuck in their mouth when eating, yawning or shedding their skin. Swallowing substrate over time can lead to blockages which would require veterinary treatment.

5. Heating your enclosure.....

The most suitable heat source which I would recommend is a heat mat, which **MUST** be connected to a thermostat, placed underneath the RUB not inside it. A thermostat is essential for controlling temperatures and without the snake could easily burn.



If you are housing in a viv there are many issues with using ceramic bulbs, if using a ceramic bulb it must have a guard around it which is the correct size to protect your snake. Ceramic bulbs make keeping good humidity a real issue as they dry the air and humidity is very important particularly when your Ball Python is trying to shed his skin.

You will need thermometers or what I recommend using is a handheld laser infrared digital temperature gun. This is a very useful tool to have as it enables monitoring temperatures very quick and easy (These can be found on eBay for as little as £10). It is very important to get accurate temperatures for your ball python.



Click the link to take you straight to this item on eBay

<https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Handheld-LCD-Digital-Laser-Thermometer-Temperature-Infrared-Non-Contact-IR-Gun/142456227542?hash=item212b0d86d6:g:rQ0AAOSwQPtdURyL>

Ball Pythons require a 'hot spot' and a 'cool spot' to enable them to regulate their temperature. Hot end temperatures need to be between 33/34 degrees. Cool end temperatures ideally need to be around 27 degrees.

Lighting is not necessary for Ball Python's the natural light in the room is sufficient. Bright overhead continuous lighting is stressful to snakes, especially species such as the Ball Python.

6. What you need in your enclosure....

Ball Pythons are very secretive snakes and enjoy squeezing into small spaces to feel safe and secure, therefore to ensure a happy ball python a hide is essential. The hide box needs to be only slightly larger than the python. Ideally use two hides providing one at each end of the enclosure so that it doesn't have to choose between staying in the hot or cool end.



Click the link to take you straight to these items on my website

<https://livingartballpythons.co.uk/shop?olsPage=products>

An appropriately sized water bowl is required and fresh water should always be available. A good size guide for a water bowl is to make sure if your ball python wanted to squeeze into his bowl for example when in shed, could he fit? Ball Pythons seem to enjoy a soak from time to time and will climb into their water bowls. The water bowl should be cleaned and disinfected twice weekly and fresh water provided daily.



7. Humidity....

Ball Pythons require humidity levels of 50 to 60 percent. When your Ball Python is going into shed it requires higher humidity levels around 90. It is important to increase the humidity levels from the first moment you notice you snake going into shed and maintain this humidity until the Python completely sheds.

To raise the humidity, I recommend moving the water bowl to the back of the RUB where the heat is, ensure the bowl is full and spill a little warm water at the back, so it is damp but not wet. The RUB wants to stay like this throughout the entire shed process. Ensure to change the paper every couple of days and provide fresh water.

Signs your Ball Python is going into shed are; milking or clouding of the eyes; pink belly and dulling of colours. Before a Ball Python actually sheds its skin it will clear and appear 'normal' again, it is important to still maintain the increased humidity levels as this is a sign that the Python will shed in the next 1-2 days.