

Pine, Bull and Gopher Snakes

All *Pituophis* species

CAGING: These snakes get big, averaging six feet, but sometimes reaching eight feet. The cage should provide enough room for your snake to move around comfortably, have good ventilation, and be easy to clean. On aquariums, use fine mesh wire covers, with clips to hold it on. Be sure they are secure enough to hold the snake. Black and white newspaper or paper towels make good bedding as they are economical and easily removed. Don't use colored paper or sand, shavings, or other bedding which might be swallowed with food, as this can kill your snake. An easy to clean, plastic or ceramic hiding box will provide a sense of security for your snake. A climbing branch is often welcome.

WATER: Fresh water must be available at all times. The water dish should be spill proof.

TEMPERATURE: *Pituophis* are generally temperate climate animals and do best at temperatures of 75 to 85 degrees, so some type of heating is needed. This can be provided by an ordinary, drug-store heating pad or a red light bulb in a reflector fitting. (A red light bulb will allow the snake to sleep without having to turn off the heat at night.) The heating pad can be placed under the cage. The light should be placed above the cage so that it shines down into the cage. Place either one so that only one end of the cage is heated, giving your snake a temperature gradient. A thermometer should be kept in the warm end of the cage to assure that you maintain a good temperature.

FOOD: *Pituophis* can be kept healthy in captivity on a diet of mice, rats, or small rabbits, depending on the snakes' size. These snakes sometimes go off their feed, especially during the winter months; don't worry unless it is obviously losing weight.

HEALTH: Cages must be kept clean to prevent ticks, mites, infections, scale rot, and other problems. Anti-bacterial cleaning solutions are recommended. One ounce of bleach in ten ounces of water is one such solution. Rinse the cage with clean water after using any solution. Don't use Lysol, Lestoil or other such oil-based cleaners; they are deadly to reptiles.

HANDLING: Most snakes don't object to being handled two or three times a week. Don't handle any snake for 48 hours after feeding, or if it becomes ill or stops feeding, unless the cage needs cleaning. Keep handling to a minimum when your snake is getting ready to shed. The skin can be damaged easily during this time.

When first acquired, these snakes are sometimes aggressive; hissing (very loudly), vibrating their tails, even striking. Gentle handling and proper care will usually transform them into excellent pets in a matter of weeks. Captive bred snakes are much more likely to become tame than wild caught animals.

This Care Sheet was originally written by New England Herpetological Society. It can be found at www.neherp.com or www.AnimalCityInc.com



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