

Care Sheet for Common Boa Constrictor

Species: Common Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor imperator*)

Size:

Hatchlings (Neonates) range from about 14 to 22 inches (average 18 inches)

Adults range from 5-12 feet (males average 6-8 ft, females 7-10 ft).

Lifespan:

It is not uncommon for Common Boas to live 20+ years in a healthy captive environment.

Sexing and Characteristics:

Sexing of hatchlings is relatively straightforward but should only be undertaken by an experienced handler or veterinarian.

Common Boas are beautiful snakes native to Central and South America, with striking markings along the length of their body. Background colouration may be pale grey but can vary considerably in shade. Notable are the saddle patterns on its back which gradually change as one approaches the lower third of the body into brown (through or ruby red) patterns. Such is the pattern and colour difference that one can almost gain the impression that two different snakes have been joined together! Also characteristic of Boa Constrictors is the diamond-shaped head and black facial stripe which passes through the eye.

Temperament:

Common Boas are generally non-aggressive. Hatchlings can be a bit nippy and will often hiss and strike repeatedly if disturbed (or if they feel like it!). However, they usually calm with regular handling.

Adults tend to be quite docile, but, there are some exceptions. Most will remain docile, as long as they feel secure, are well looked-after and are handled regularly.

Housing, Substrate and Water Needs:

Common Boas are best kept in a wooden or plastic vivarium which holds heat and humidity better than an all-glass enclosure. Newsprint, butcher's paper, aspen bedding, cypress mulch or ground coconut husks are all safe choices providing as they remain dry. **Cedar shavings and pine shavings should be avoided as they release aromatic phenolic oils which are toxic to snakes.**

Boas are large snakes but they still require at least one hide box, preferably in both the warm and cold sections of the tank, to help the animal feel secure. Artificial vines and plants are great for a good looking enclosure but must be firmly fixed to handle the strength of the snakes. Some rough item, such as a rock, is a good idea to assist shedding. Although a securely attached climbing branch is important for young Boa Constrictors, it is not necessary for adult specimens as they spend most

of their time on the ground (terrestrial). A water bowl, large enough for the snake to completely submerge itself in should be provided containing fresh clean water, in the cool region of the enclosure. The water should be changed at least every other day, preferably daily and the bowl washed thoroughly at least twice a week.

Enclosure Size: A minimum of at least 1 square foot of ground space, per foot length of Boa is usually recommended. So, an eight-foot Boa should be housed in an enclosure with no less than 8 square feet of ground space (e.g., 4ft long x 2ft deep). It is always better to provide a larger, rather than smaller enclosure, especially for adult Boa Constrictors, such as 6ft or 8ft long by 2ft deep for an 8ft snake.

Lighting and UVB:

Boa Constrictors do not require any additional specialist lighting equipment, such as ultraviolet (UV), as daytime lighting *via* a window is all that is really necessary.

Temperatures and Humidity:

Like any reptile, Boa Constrictors should be offered a temperature gradient, ranging from warm (between 86 & 90°F) to cool (between 79 & 83°F). This allows them to thermoregulate (choose the best temperature) at any time.

At night-time, a reduction in temperature is not normally necessary unless you are intending to breed your snake. Temperatures should not exceed 90°F or fall below 75°F at any time.

Humidity:

Humidity levels should be maintained at between 55-65% at all times. This may be raised for a short period of time (less than a week) to between 70 & 80% during shedding. Boa Constrictors do not respond well to continuously high humidity as they are prone to skin diseases and blistering in these conditions.

Heating Equipment:

Under-tank heating pads or a direct heat lamp should always be controlled by a digital thermostat, so as to maintain accurate temperatures (especially in the warm zone) at all times. Thermometers and hydrometers should be used to monitor temperature and humidity, with the digital variety being considerably more accurate than cheaper dial types.

Diet:

Boa Constrictors are carnivores, so they eat meat, namely rodents. Feed your snake appropriately-sized, pre-killed or frozen thawed rats. Hatchlings may be started on rat pinkies. For the first year of life, 1 rat pup (as thick as the thickest girth of the snake's body) once-a-week will suffice. During the second year of life, one appropriately sized rat should be fed every 10- 14 days. Adult Boa Constrictors may be fed every 14-21 days. Larger adults may take rabbits, but these are higher in fat and will continue to encourage growth. Boas may be maintained at a healthier, more manageable size by feeding them rats on a moderate schedule. **It is important that Boa Constrictors should not**

be handled for at least 48-hours after feeding as this may cause them to regurgitate their meal, leading potentially to sustained feeding problems.

Supplements, Nutrition and Usage:

None required.

Shedding

Boa Constrictors typically shed every 6-8 weeks (more frequently as juveniles). Preparation for shedding may be recognised by the snake's belly turning a pinkish shade, followed by a general dulling in colour. The eyes will 'blue' (turn a milky blue or even white colour) followed by clearing. Shedding usually occurs 2-5 days after the eyes have cleared.

Boa Constrictors should not be handled during their shed cycle, as they can become very vulnerable and aggressive. Feeding should also be avoided at this time (many snakes will refuse to feed anyway).

Humidity levels should always be increased during a shed cycle so as to ensure a complete shed of the skin in one piece (see above).

Maintenance Overview:

1. Always wash your hands and arms with a quality antibacterial soap **before and after** handling Your Boa Constrictor. Faeces and urine (which can be delivered in large quantities!) should be spot-cleaned immediately they are discovered.
2. Water should be changed daily.
3. Keep commercial cleaning chemicals and fumes away from the snake's enclosure as these could kill it.
4. Keep a daily watch on temperature and humidity and adjust as necessary.
5. Keep a log of feeding, shedding and other habits.
6. Keep a regular watching check on your Boa for mites and other health concerns and always refer to an experienced veterinarian if in doubt (it's always a good idea to locate a local specialist before you need them!).
7. Keep reading, talking and learning ☺

(Original care sheet and information supplied by <http://repticzone.com>)