Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Rat Snake Care

Please note these care sheets are intended for the average reptile owner to ensure that your pet is receiving basic care needed to have a healthy life and there are other aspects of advanced care that can be considered for healthy pets.

Brief Description
Rat snakes *(Pantherophis species)* are native to the southeastern and central US mostly. There are several different species that have a variety of color patterns. Adults can get up to 6 feet in length but the average is 4-5 feet in length. These snakes move fast but are generally docile in nature.



Lifespan
With good care the expected lifespan is 10-20 years on average.

Sexing
The most common way to determine gender of snakes is to have them probed by an experienced professional, where the hemipene pocket length is measured to determine if it male or female. Males will have much deeper pockets than females.

Caging
Cages can range from very simple to very elaborate. Ideally your snake should have enough room to stretch the entire length of its body straight without touching the ends, however many snakes tend to do well in smaller habitats like 20-40 gallon tanks. Sweater boxes can also be used successfully with an under-tank-heater to maintain a temperature gradient however enrichment potential in such cages is low. The lid of the enclosure needs to be secure as snakes can stretch to the top and forcibly push a lid off. The cage should contain at least two hides that have one opening and allow the snake to fit snugly within it. Lack of appropriate hides will cause stress. Rat snakes should be kept individually

Substrate
Newspaper, paper towels or artificial turf like reptile carpet can be used for minimal mess and clean up as long as multiple hides are provided. Aspen shavings work best for allowing burrowing while being easy to clean. Mulch, and soil allow burrowing but are more difficult to clean and can harbor mold or bacterial growth if not cleaned often. Sand and cedar or pine shavings should be avoided.

Lighting and Temperature
Reptiles are ectotherms (cold-blooded), meaning they need to absorb heat from their environment to regulate their own body heat since they cannot produce it. The basking spot should be around **85-90 degrees** at the level of the basking spot and the cooler end of the cage should be kept around **70 degrees**. A thermometer should be placed at the same level as the pet in the basking area to accurately measure temperatures. Corn snakes do not require UVB lighting, however there is some evidence that they may benefit from it. Providing UVB should be considered.

Humidity
Humidity in the enclosure should be 20-40% and should be monitored by a hygrometer. Inadequate humidity will affect your reptile's ability to shed its skin properly and can cause serious problems.

Water
A shallow water dish with fresh water at least big enough for your whole snake's body to fit in curled up should be available at all times. The dishes used under potted plants are excellent for water dishes and inexpensive. Snakes enjoy full body soakings but often defecate in their water so it needs to be cleaned often.

Food
Rat snakes can eat a variety of prey but rodents are the most easily available food source and variety is not necessary. Young snakes should be fed once to twice weekly, whereas adults can be fed every week. Appropriately sized prey should be no bigger in circumference than the snake at its largest circumference. Feeding thawed frozen prey is preferred as offering live prey can lead to a more aggressive snake and potential injury to the snake that can be very severe. Frozen prey should be warmed to near body temperature to stimulate your snake to eat it.