## **YVCipedia REPTILE**

Corn Snake Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

The **corn snake (*Pantherophis guttatus*)** is a medium-sized, non-venomous colubrid native to the southeastern United States. Famous for their gentle temperament, beautiful color variations (morphs), and relatively straightforward care, corn snakes are one of the **most popular pet snakes** in North America.

Corn snakes are **terrestrial and semi-arboreal**, spending time on the ground as well as climbing low branches in the wild. They’re generally **docile, curious, and easy to handle**, making them an excellent choice for reptile enthusiasts of all experience levels. With proper care, they typically live **15–20+ years** in captivity.

## **Housing & Environment**

Corn snakes need **secure, escape-proof enclosures** with enough space to allow natural behaviors like exploring, hiding, and climbing.

**Minimum enclosure size:**

* Juveniles: 20-gallon long tank
* Adults: At least **40 gallons** or **36–48 inches long** enclosure recommended
* Larger is always better to encourage exercise and enrichment

**Key enclosure features:**

* Tight-fitting, locking lid or doors
* Multiple **hides**: one on the warm side, one on the cool side
* Branches and climbing decor for enrichment
* Substrate that holds humidity and allows burrowing

**Recommended substrates:**

* Aspen shavings
* Cypress mulch
* Paper-based bedding
* Avoid cedar or pine shavings (toxic oils)

**Cleaning:**

* Spot-clean feces and urates daily or as needed
* Replace substrate fully and disinfect enclosure monthly or as needed

## **Heating & Lighting**

Corn snakes are **ectothermic**, relying on environmental temperatures to regulate their metabolism and digestion.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Warm side:** 85–88°F (hot spot on substrate)
* **Cool side:** 75–80°F
* **Nighttime:** Can drop to ~70–75°F safely

**Heating:**

* Under-tank heat mats (belly heat) controlled by a **thermostat** are recommended to provide safe, stable warmth
* Overhead ceramic heat emitters or low-wattage bulbs can also be used if needed
* Always avoid heat rocks, which can cause burns

**Lighting:**

* Corn snakes are **crepuscular/nocturnal** and do not need intense UVB lighting, but **low-level UVB (2–5%) may be beneficial** for overall health
* Provide a regular **12-hour light/dark cycle** using timers

## **Humidity**

Corn snakes do best with **moderate humidity levels of ~40–60%**.

**Humidity management tips:**

* Light misting if needed to maintain levels
* Provide a **humid hide** with damp sphagnum moss, especially during shedding
* Monitor with a **digital hygrometer** for accuracy

Proper humidity helps prevent **shedding issues** and dehydration.

## **Water & Hydration**

Always provide **clean, fresh water** in a stable, tip-resistant dish large enough for soaking.

**Hydration tips:**

* Change water daily to prevent bacterial growth
* Clean and disinfect water bowls weekly or more often if soiled
* Many corn snakes will soak in their water dish, especially before shedding

## **Diet & Feeding**

Corn snakes are **strict carnivores** eating whole prey. In captivity, they are typically fed **appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents**.

**Feeding guidelines:**

* Prey size = about **1–1.5× the widest part of the snake’s body**
* Juveniles: Every 5–7 days
* Adults: Every 7–14 days depending on age, size, and metabolism

**Feeding tips:**

* Always feed **appropriately thawed (not live)** prey to prevent injury
* Feed in enclosure or in a separate feeding tub, depending on your snake’s temperament
* Monitor weight and body condition to avoid obesity or malnutrition

## **Behavior & Handling**

Corn snakes are **generally docile and easy to handle**, making them a favorite for beginners and experienced keepers alike.

**Handling recommendations:**

* Wash hands before and after to prevent scent confusion or disease transmission
* Support the entire body, allowing the snake to move freely over your hands
* Avoid sudden movements that may startle
* Limit handling after feeding (wait ~48 hours to prevent regurgitation)
* Keep sessions short at first, gradually increasing as your snake becomes accustomed to interaction

Proper handling builds trust and reduces stress for both the snake and the handler.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Schedule an **initial veterinary exam** after acquisition and **annual checkups** with a reptile-experienced veterinarian.

**Common health issues include:**

* Respiratory infections (often from incorrect temps or humidity)
* Mites and external parasites
* Shedding problems (dysecdysis)
* Internal parasites (especially in wild-caught or improperly sourced animals)
* Mouth infections (stomatitis)
* Obesity from overfeeding

**Warning signs of illness:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Refusal to eat for multiple feeding cycles (excluding normal seasonal fluctuations)
* Wheezing, open-mouth breathing, or mucus around the mouth/nose
* Retained shed, especially around the eyes
* Swelling or lesions in the mouth
* Weight loss without diet changes

Prompt veterinary care improves outcomes and prevents complications.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Corn snakes are **active, curious, and benefit greatly from enrichment**.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Provide multiple hides of varying sizes and materials
* Branches, logs, and ledges for climbing
* Burrow-friendly substrate for natural digging behavior
* Rearrange décor occasionally to stimulate exploration
* Offer varying textures and cover for security

A dynamic, enriched enclosure promotes **natural behaviors** and reduces stress.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Named for the **corn-like pattern** on their bellies and their historical presence around corn storage facilities (attracting rodents).
* Non-venomous constrictors—**safe and gentle pets** when properly handled.
* Available in **dozens of color and pattern morphs** bred in captivity.
* Can live **15–20+ years** with proper care.
* Native to **southeastern U.S.**, thriving in forests, fields, and barns.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Escape-proof enclosure (≥40 gallons recommended for adults)
* Under-tank heat mat with thermostat
* Digital thermometers and hygrometer
* Secure hides (warm and cool sides)
* Climbing branches and décor
* Moist hide with damp moss for shedding
* Appropriate substrate (aspen, cypress mulch, paper-based)
* Shallow water dish for soaking
* Tongs for safe feeding
* Frozen/thawed appropriately sized rodents
* Cleaning supplies and disinfectants
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*