## **YVCipedia REPTILE**

Hognose Snake Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Hognose snakes (*Heterodon* spp.) are **small, terrestrial colubrids** native to North America. They’re famous for their **upturned “hog-like” nose**, which they use for digging, and for dramatic defensive behaviors like flattening their necks, hissing loudly, and even playing dead.

The **Western hognose snake** (*Heterodon nasicus*) is the most commonly kept species in captivity. They are **generally docile, hardy, and entertaining to observe**, making them popular among reptile enthusiasts.

Adult Western hognose snakes typically reach **2–3 feet** in length and can live **15–20 years** in captivity with proper care.

## **Housing & Environment**

Hognose snakes are **terrestrial and fossorial**, meaning they love to burrow. They require secure, escape-proof enclosures with **ample floor space and deep, diggable substrate**.

**Minimum enclosure size:**

* Juveniles: 20-gallon long tank
* Adults: At least **30–40 gallons** (larger always better for enrichment)

**Key enclosure features:**

* Tight-fitting, escape-proof lid or doors (they’re good at pushing)
* Multiple secure hides: warm side and cool side
* Deep substrate (4–6 inches or more) to allow natural burrowing behavior
* Branches or décor for limited climbing and enrichment

**Recommended substrates:**

* Aspen shavings (easy to burrow, safe, dry)
* Sand-soil mixes (if carefully managed to avoid impaction)
* Paper-based bedding for simple, low-risk setups (less natural for digging)
* Avoid cedar or pine shavings (toxic oils)

**Cleaning guidelines:**

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

## **Heating & Lighting**

Hognose snakes are **ectothermic** and depend on environmental temperatures for metabolism and digestion.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Warm side/hot spot:** 85–90°F (belly heat)
* **Cool side:** 72–78°F
* **Nighttime:** Can drop to ~70°F safely

**Heating:**

* Under-tank heat mat controlled by a **thermostat** for safe, stable belly heat
* Overhead ceramic heat emitters or low-wattage bulbs if needed
* Avoid heat rocks (burn risk)

**Lighting:**

* Hognose snakes are **diurnal** (day-active) and benefit from a clear light/dark cycle
* UVB is **not required**, but **low-level UVB (2–5%) may offer health benefits**
* Use timers for **12-hour light/dark cycles** to mimic natural day length

## **Humidity**

Hognose snakes prefer **low to moderate humidity**, typically **30–50%**, depending on your local climate.

**Humidity tips:**

* Avoid over-misting—excessive humidity can cause respiratory issues
* Provide a **humid hide** with damp sphagnum moss for shedding support
* Monitor with a **digital hygrometer** to maintain appropriate levels

Proper humidity prevents **shedding issues** while avoiding respiratory infections.

## **Water & Hydration**

Always provide **clean, fresh water** in a sturdy, tip-resistant bowl.

**Water care guidelines:**

* Change water daily to prevent bacterial growth
* Clean and disinfect the dish weekly or as needed
* Many hognose snakes will drink infrequently but need the option available

## **Diet & Feeding**

Hognose snakes are **strict carnivores** that feed on whole prey. In captivity, they thrive on **appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents**.

**Feeding guidelines:**

* Prey size ≈ 1–1.25× the widest part of the snake’s body
* Juveniles: Feed every 4–5 days
* Adults: Feed every 7–10 days

**Feeding tips:**

* Always feed **appropriately thawed, never live** prey to prevent injuries
* Use tongs to avoid accidental bites
* Feed in enclosure or separate tub depending on snake temperament
* Avoid handling for 48 hours post-feeding to prevent regurgitation
* Monitor body condition to avoid obesity or malnutrition

Some keepers report hognose snakes can be **picky eaters**, especially males—patience and consistency are key.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Hognose snakes are known for **unique defensive behaviors** like hissing, neck flattening (cobra-like hood), and playing dead. These displays are usually **bluff**—they rarely bite.

**Handling recommendations:**

* Wash hands before and after handling
* Support the body fully, allowing the snake to move freely
* Handle calmly and gently, avoiding sudden movements
* Limit handling after feeding or during shed cycles
* Gradually increase session length to build confidence

With gentle, consistent handling, most hognose snakes become **calm and tolerate interaction well**.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

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

**Common health issues:**

* Respiratory infections (from incorrect humidity or temperatures)
* Shedding problems (dysecdysis)
* Mites or other external parasites
* Internal parasites (especially in wild-caught or poorly sourced animals)
* Obesity from overfeeding or inappropriate prey sizes

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Loss of appetite over multiple feeding cycles
* Wheezing, open-mouth breathing, or nasal discharge
* Abnormal or incomplete shedding
* Swelling or lesions in the mouth
* Unexplained weight loss

Early veterinary care improves outcomes and helps prevent complications.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Hognose snakes **love to burrow and explore**, benefiting greatly from a naturalistic, enriched setup.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Deep substrate for digging and tunneling
* Multiple hides with varied shapes and materials
* Branches or décor for climbing and exploration
* Periodically rearranged décor to stimulate exploration
* Textured surfaces to aid in shedding

A well-designed habitat encourages **natural behaviors** and reduces stress.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Named for their **distinctive upturned nose** used for digging.
* Famous for dramatic **bluff displays**—neck flattening, hissing, and playing dead.
* Mildly venomous (rear-fanged), but **generally harmless to humans**—bites are rare and usually cause minimal reaction.
* Native to **North American grasslands and prairies** with sandy, loose soils for burrowing.
* Typically live **15–20+ years** in captivity with proper care.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Secure, escape-proof enclosure (≥30–40 gallons for adults)
* Under-tank heat mat with thermostat
* Digital thermometers and hygrometer
* Deep, burrow-friendly substrate (aspen, sand-soil mix)
* Multiple hides (warm and cool sides)
* Moist hide with damp moss for shedding support
* Branches or décor for enrichment
* Sturdy, tip-resistant water dish
* Tongs for safe feeding
* Frozen/thawed appropriately sized rodents
* Cleaning supplies and reptile-safe disinfectants
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*