## **YVCipedia REPTILE**

Kingsnake Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Kingsnakes (*Lampropeltis* spp.) are **medium-sized, non-venomous colubrids** native to North America. Popular species include the **California kingsnake**, **Eastern kingsnake**, and **Florida kingsnake**, among others. Known for striking color patterns (bands, stripes, or speckling), kingsnakes are hardy, adaptable, and make **excellent pets for reptile enthusiasts**.

They are **constrictors**, subduing prey by coiling and squeezing, and are famously named “kingsnakes” for their tendency to eat other snakes in the wild—even venomous ones. In captivity, they are **docile and curious**, with proper handling. With good care, they typically live **15–20+ years**.

## **Housing & Environment**

Kingsnakes are **terrestrial but active** and enjoy exploring, burrowing, and limited climbing.

**Minimum enclosure size:**

* Juveniles: 20-gallon long tank
* Adults: At least **40 gallons** or 36–48 inches long
* Larger enclosures are always better

**Key enclosure features:**

* Escape-proof, tight-fitting locking lid or doors (kingsnakes are notorious escape artists)
* Multiple hides: at least one on warm side, one on cool side
* Branches or low climbing décor for enrichment
* Substrate that supports burrowing and easy cleaning

**Recommended substrates:**

* Aspen shavings (excellent for burrowing)
* Cypress mulch
* Paper-based bedding for low maintenance
* 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 more often if needed

## **Heating & Lighting**

Kingsnakes are **ectothermic** and rely on environmental heat to regulate metabolism and digestion.

**Temperature gradient:**

* **Warm side/hot spot:** 85–88°F
* **Cool side:** 75–80°F
* **Nighttime:** Safe to drop to ~70–75°F

**Heating:**

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

**Lighting:**

* Kingsnakes are crepuscular/nocturnal and do not require UVB lighting
* However, **low-level UVB (2–5%) may provide benefits** for overall health
* Provide a **12-hour light/dark cycle** with timers for a consistent day/night rhythm

## **Humidity**

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

**Humidity management tips:**

* Light misting if needed
* Provide a **humid hide** with damp sphagnum moss, especially during shedding cycles
* Digital hygrometer for accuracy

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

## **Water & Hydration**

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

**Water guidelines:**

* Change water daily to prevent bacterial growth
* Clean and disinfect the water dish weekly or more often if soiled
* Many kingsnakes will soak before shedding, so ensure the dish is large enough to accommodate them

## **Diet & Feeding**

Kingsnakes are **strict carnivores**, feeding on whole prey. In captivity, they thrive on **appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents**.

**Feeding guidelines:**

* Prey size ≈ 1–1.5× the widest part of the snake’s body
* Juveniles: Feed every 5–7 days
* Adults: Feed every 7–14 days depending on size and age

**Feeding tips:**

* Always feed **frozen/thawed (never live)** to prevent injury
* Feed in the enclosure or separate feeding tubs (depending on temperament)
* Avoid handling for 48 hours after feeding to prevent regurgitation
* Monitor weight and body condition to avoid overfeeding

## **Behavior & Handling**

Kingsnakes are **generally docile, curious, and tolerate handling well** once accustomed to it.

**Handling recommendations:**

* Wash hands before and after handling
* Support the entire body, allowing the snake to move freely
* Avoid sudden movements or grabbing from above
* Start with short sessions to build trust
* Never handle immediately after feeding

Regular, gentle handling can reduce stress and support **positive keeper-snake interactions**.

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

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

**Common health issues include:**

* Respiratory infections (linked to incorrect temps/humidity)
* External parasites (mites)
* Internal parasites (especially in wild-caught animals)
* Shedding problems (dysecdysis)
* Stomatitis (mouth infections)
* Obesity (from overfeeding or improper prey sizing)

**Warning signs:**

* Lethargy or weakness
* Persistent refusal to eat (beyond normal seasonal fasting)
* Wheezing, open-mouth breathing, nasal discharge
* Retained shed, especially around the eyes
* Swollen jaw or mouth lesions
* Weight loss without diet changes

Prompt veterinary care can prevent complications and improve outcomes.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

Kingsnakes are **active, inquisitive snakes** that benefit from a dynamic environment.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Multiple hides of varying shapes and materials
* Branches or driftwood for climbing
* Burrow-friendly substrate for digging
* Rearranged décor to encourage exploration
* Varied textures and cover to create security and interest

Enrichment promotes **natural behaviors** and reduces stress.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Named “kingsnake” because they **eat other snakes** in the wild—including venomous species.
* Non-venomous constrictors, **safe to handle** when properly socialized.
* Highly adaptable, found in a variety of habitats across North America.
* Famous escape artists—**secure enclosures are essential**.
* Typically live **15–20+ years** in captivity with proper care.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* Escape-proof enclosure (≥40 gallons 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)
* Tip-resistant water dish large enough for soaking
* Tongs for safe feeding
* Frozen/thawed appropriately sized rodents
* Cleaning supplies and reptile-safe disinfectants
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*