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# CARE SHEET King Snake

This care sheet covers a variety of kingsnakes, including:

- Banana
- Desert
- California banded
- Albino
- Lavender



## Overview

*Lampropeltis getula*

Kingsnakes are native to temperate and subtropical areas of North and Central America. These snakes have been bred to come in a variety of colors and patterns. They make good pets because they are docile, adapt well to captivity and are diurnal (awake during the day). Their Latin name means "shiny shields" to reflect their glossy scales. They are nonvenomous constrictors, meaning in nature they constrict and suffocate their prey before eating it.

## Typical Appearance and Behavior

- California kingsnakes have alternating circumferential rings of white/yellow and black down the length of their bodies. Other common varieties include albino banded and lavender.
- These snakes are generally docile, but when they feel threatened by a predator, they may shake their tails and strike or defecate or urinate on the predator to deter restraint.
- To get them accustomed to handling, pick them up regularly and move hand over hand with them as they move, being sure to avoid their faces.
- As your snake gets ready to shed, their eyes will turn a milky blue/grey over the course of a few days, and their body color will start to dull and develop a whitish sheen. They may become irritable; avoid handling if possible.
- They will eat other snakes if housed together and should be housed singly.

## Characteristics

- Care Difficulty: Intermediate
- Average Life Span: Up to 15+ years with proper care, depending on species
- Average Adult Size: 2 to 6 feet long depending on species
- Diet: Carnivore
- Minimum Habitat Size: 20L tank minimum for one adult

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## HOUSING

### Habitat Size

A 10-gallon tank is adequate for a juvenile; however, increase habitat to a 20L tank to house a medium-sized adult. They reach adult size in 3 years, depending on species and under ideal conditions. Larger kingsnakes should be housed in 40B tanks. Provide an appropriately sized and shaped habitat for an adult kingsnake to accommodate normal behavior (including stretching out) and exercise. Habitats should have a tightly fitting screen top to allow adequate ventilation and prevent escape.

## ENVIRONMENT

Since kingsnakes are reptiles, their terrarium should contain a cool side and a warm side to allow them to regulate their body temperatures. A thermometer should be placed on each side of the habitat and a hygrometer should be placed in the middle to provide information on humidity. A high-wattage heat bulb can be placed directly above the high point in the terrarium for the snake to bask in during the day. For evenings, the heat bulb should be turned off and a ceramic under-tank heater or night heat lamp can be used to maintain proper nighttime temperatures. Their habitat also needs to provide areas to hide and branches or decor for the python to climb on. The ground of the terrarium needs to be covered in substrate such as aspen shavings or reptile bark that is cleaned weekly with a 3% bleach solution.

### Building Your Habitat

- **Substrate** - Commercially available paper-based bedding is ideal, as it is digestible if accidentally ingested. Aspen shavings are also acceptable. Pine and cedar chips should be avoided, as they have oils on them that can irritate their skin and respiratory tracts. Substrate should be deep enough for the snake to hide in. If using reptile carpet as a substrate, be sure to provide at least one hide box to allow the snake to feel secure.
- **Décor** – Provide driftwood, commercially available half logs or large rocks, artificial plants or cork bark to make a hiding area just large enough for your snake to fit inside, plus branches or other décor to climb on. Décor is also important for snakes to rub on when shedding.

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- **Humidity** - The habitat should contain a water dish large enough for the snake to soak in, help sustain humidity levels, keep the snake hydrated and aid in shedding. Maintain humidity between 40 to 60%; monitor humidity level with a humidity gauge. Humidity should be higher during shedding. Humidity may be increased during shedding by creating a humid hide containing moist sphagnum moss. Moss should be changed frequently to prevent mold growth.
- **Temperature** - Snakes are ectothermic reptiles, which means they rely on their environmental temperature to control their body temperature. To help them regulate their body temperatures, provide a temperature gradient (85°F for the warm end and 70-75°F for the cool end/nighttime) in the tank. Monitor temperature with at least two thermometers—one in the cool zone and the other in the hot (basking) zone. Heat may be provided by a heat bulb, ceramic heat bulb or an under-tank heating pad. Heat sources should be attached to thermostats to regulate temperatures. Thermostats are especially important with heating pads, which can get hot and cause burns through the tank floor if not regulated properly. Hot rocks should not be used as a heat source, as they can burn reptiles. Reptiles not kept at the appropriate temperature ranges are more likely to become immunosuppressed and get sick.
- **Lighting** - While snakes do not require ultraviolet (UV)B light to survive, some studies suggest that UVB light may increase snakes' activity levels and aid in their overall health. Providing snakes with a low-level UVB light helps provide a clear day/night cycle (with 10 to 12 hours of daylight) that kingsnakes need to perform their normal daily activities. UV bulbs should be replaced every six months, as their potency wanes. Provide 8 to 12 hours of light daily. Don't leave white light on all the time; a nocturnal or infrared light should be used at night.

## CARE

### Daily:

- Spot-clean the habitat daily to remove droppings.
- Clean and refill water dish

### Weekly:

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the habitat at least once a week.
- Place snake in a secure habitat.
- Remove all substrate and habitat décor.
- Scrub the tank and furnishings with a reptile habitat cleaner or 3% bleach solution.

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- Rinse tank and furnishings thoroughly with water, removing all traces of habitat cleaner or bleach smell.
- Dry the tank and furnishings completely.
- Add clean substrate and put furnishings back into the tank.
- Put snake back into their clean, dry habitat.

## Diet

A well-balanced kingsnake diet consists of:

- Appropriately sized frozen rodents, properly thawed and warmed.
- Pinkies up to small mice may be fed to hatchlings/juveniles; large mice or rats are typically fed to adults.
- Live rodents should not be fed, as live rodents may bite snakes who are not hungry and can cause life-threatening injuries. If you must offer live rodents to a snake, never leave them unattended in the tank with the snake because of the potential risk of injury to the snake.

Feeding your kingsnake:

- Do not use a microwave to defrost frozen rodents, as microwaved rodents can have hot spots that can burn snakes' mouths when they eat them.
- Do not prepare frozen rodents for feeding in the same area that you prepare human food. If it is unavoidable, be sure to thoroughly disinfect the area. See the Feeding Frozen/Thawed Foods Care Sheet for more information.
- Feed juveniles once to twice a week and adults once a week; decrease feeding adults to every other week if they are becoming overweight. Kingsnakes are voracious eaters and will gain weight rapidly.
- Feed in an empty tank, separate from the habitat, so that the snake doesn't associate your hand or the habitat lid opening with feeding and doesn't accidentally ingest bedding off the habitat floor when eating.
- Fresh, clean water should be available at all times in an untipable bowl large enough for the snake to soak in. The bowl should be placed in the cool end of the habitat so that the water doesn't evaporate too quickly.
- As snakes will not typically eat while shedding, avoid feeding when snakes are in shed.

## Shedding

Snakes will regularly shed their skin and the covering over their eyes (called the eye cap or spectacle); ensure humidity of habitat is at appropriate level to allow snake to shed properly. Skin should be shed in a single long piece.

- Never try to remove retained eye caps by yourself, as you can easily cause damage. Seek veterinary care if eye caps are retained

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## Habitat Mates

Kingsnakes are ophiophagus, meaning they will eat other snakes, including members of their own species.

- House kingsnakes singly as they will consume other snakes
- Do not house different snake species together

## Health

Signs of a healthy snake

- Active and alert
- Clear eyes (except when shedding)
- No discharge or bubbles from eyes, nose or mouth
- Eats food and passes stool regularly
- Supple skin without lesions, swellings, scabs, parasites (mites, ticks) or discoloration
- Regularly sheds skin in one complete piece

## Health Issues-contact your veterinarian if you notice any of these signs

- Unusually frequent or infrequent shedding
- Vomiting
- Lethargy or reluctance to eat
- Abnormal feces or lack of feces
- Lesions, swellings, scabs, discoloration or parasites (mites, ticks) on skin
- Labored breathing/breathing with open mouth
- Difficulty shedding/shedding in numerous pieces/retained skin after shed
- White, cheesy discharge or redness or scabs in mouth
- Laying on back, unable to turn right-side-up or prolonged staring ("star-gazing")

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## COMMON HEALTH ISSUES

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Recommendation
Dermatitis	Blisters, rapid shedding caused by skin infections from viruses, bacteria, fungus or parasites, or an unclean habitat or one that has inappropriate temperature or humidity	Consult your veterinarian, clean the habitat, and ensure proper temperature and humidity.
Respiratory tract disease	Labored breathing/open-mouth breathing, stretching neck out, mucus or bubbles in mouth, eyes or nostrils. Can be caused by infection with bacteria, viruses, fungus, parasites or a habitat that has inappropriate temperature or humidity.	Consult your veterinarian and ensure proper temperature and humidity.
Stomatitis	Red, swollen or scabbed gums and/or white, cheesy discharge in the mouth, loss of teeth, decreased appetite or weight loss. May be caused by bacterial, viral or fungal infections or inappropriate temperature or humidity. If untreated, may be fatal.	Immediately consult your veterinarian and ensure proper temperature and humidity.
Ticks and mites	Parasites on skin can cause itchiness and hyperactivity and can transmit disease.	Consult your veterinarian. Empty habitat and thoroughly disinfect it.

## FAQs

- **What do kingsnakes eat?** Kingsnakes should be offered appropriately sized frozen rodents depending on the snake's age and size, properly thawed and warmed
- **Is a kingsnake poisonous?** No, kingsnakes are not poisonous or venomous.
- **What is a kingsnake?** A kingsnake is a nonvenomous snake that is a member of the Colubrid family. It is a constrictor (constricting and strangulating their prey before eating them). Kingsnakes are native to North and Central America.
- **What color is a kingsnake?** Kingsnakes come in a variety of colors. The California kingsnake has alternating circumferential rings of white/yellow and black down the

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length of their bodies. Albino banded kingsnakes have alternating bands of yellow and a pinkish hue.

- **What do baby kingsnakes eat?** Pinkie mice are fed to hatchling kingsnakes, while hoppers and small adult mice can be fed to juveniles.
- **What does a baby kingsnake look like?** Kingsnakes have been bred to come in a variety of colors and patterns. The California kingsnake has alternating circumferential rings of white/yellow and black down the length of their bodies. Albino banded kingsnakes have alternating bands of yellow and a pinkish hue.
- **How big do kingsnakes get?** Kingsnakes can grow 2-6 feet long, depending on species.
- **How long do kingsnakes live?** Kingsnakes can live up to 15+ years with proper care.
- **Can kingsnakes swim?** While they spend most of their time on land, kingsnakes can swim.

## HELPFUL LINKS

What to feed your kingsnake:

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/frozen-pinkie-mouse>

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/product/frozen-fuzzy-mouse>

<https://flukerfarms.com/repta-boost-insectivore-carnivore/>

Habitat bedding and substrate:

<https://zoomed.com/aspen-snake-bedding/>

<https://zoomed.com/eco-earth-coconut-fiber-substrate/>

Habitat Heating:

<https://zoomed.com/reptitherm-under-tank-heater-u-t-h/>

Habitat Temperature Gauges:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/environmental-control/humidity-and-temperature-gauge>

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Habitat Lighting:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/lighting-heating/canopy-series-fluorescent-uvb-uva-reptile-light-bulbs>

Habitat Decor:

<https://www.zillarules.com/all-products/decor/bark-bends>

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