



Intro to Western Hognose Snake Care

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Western hognose snakes are a smaller species native to the grasslands and rocklands of the Western U.S. They love to burrow underground (their adorable “hog-nose” is somewhat used as a shovel)! Unlike many other snakes, this species is naturally awake during the day. The hognose is a small, fairly hardy snake species that can be perfect for beginner and experienced reptile keepers.

Housing

While very young hognoses will do well in a 5-10 gallon reptile tank, an adult hognose would do best in an enclosure that is at least 36 inches (3 feet) long and 18 inches wide (the equivalent of a “40Breeder” reptile tank). They do best with multiple hiding places and branches, as well as a deep substrate to burrow in. Your hognose will need a water dish that is large enough to fit its body into. You should supply your hognose with fresh water daily.

Hognoses are fossorial, meaning that they naturally dig and burrow underground. In order to replicate their natural environment as much as possible, we need to give them something to burrow in. The safest substrates to use for this will be a soil and moss mixture (such as ReptiSoil), coconut husk shavings, or very fine aspen shavings that are geared toward reptiles (NOT PINE OR CEDAR). A soil mix will allow you to mist your hognose as needed, whereas aspen shavings will not, which is an important thing to remember if you are having a hard time managing humidity. You should give your hognose a couple of inches of the substrate to burrow in.

Heat & Lighting

Hognoses are native to the western U.S. and are accustomed to daytime



temperatures in the 90s (degrees Fahrenheit). Ideally, the basking temperature (the hottest spot in the tank) should reach approximately 90-95 degrees F, the warm side of the tank should average 80-85 degrees, and the cool side of the tank should be between 70-75 degrees. These temperatures can be met using a daytime basking bulb or a ceramic heat emitter (CHE). We recommend using a dimmer on your basking bulbs and a thermostat so you have better control of the heat being emitted. At night, the temperature can decrease to the low 70s. This can be achieved either with a CHE or a reptile heating mat. Always use a reliable thermometer in the enclosure.

Whether snakes truly benefit from UVB lighting is still being studied and is a bit controversial. However, it has been noted that diurnal species such as hognoses are more active and have better feeding responses when provided with UVB lighting during the day. A UVB of 5% or 10% would be adequate. Linear bulbs (such as the Arcadia UVB T5 or T8 bulb) tend to have a longer-lasting, higher UVB output than the coil (or compact) bulbs. Compact bulbs should be replaced every 3-6 months and linear bulbs should be replaced every 8-10 months, regardless of whether they are emitting visible light.

The humidity in your enclosure should be between 30-50%, which can be maintained by moistening the soil once per week. Most of the humidity in their natural environment is in the soil! Never allow the soil to become waterlogged, as it will become a breeding ground for bacteria. You can also give your hognose a "humid hide" with dampened sphagnum moss underneath one of their favorite hides.

Diet

Although Hognoses eat mainly amphibians in the wild, they eat a rodent-based diet in captivity. Your snake should be transitioned to a rodent diet before you bring them home. Frozen thawed mice are the safest option for feeding. Young hognose snakes will eat pink mice every 3-4 days and size up as they grow. You should feed your hognose a prey item that is as wide around as their body. As they get older, they will eat "fuzzy mice", "hopper" adult mice, and "rat fuzzies". Adult hognoses can be fed once every 7 days.

Handling

Juvenile hognose snakes can be very timid and shy and may even play dead when they get frightened. Although their hissing, huffing, puffing, and playing "opossum" may seem funny or cute, these are all signs that your snake is stressed. It is important to give your snake a few days to get used to its new environment before handling it. At first, keep your interactions short and sweet, always picking your snake up from underneath their body. Front-opening enclosures work very well for handling as they allow you to come at the animal from the side rather than

from the top. Allow your snake to calm down in your hands, “walking” it from one hand to the other slowly. This will allow your snake to recognize that you are not a predator and you can build up to longer interactions. Always handle your snake close to the ground, as dropping them can cause serious injury. Avoid handling your snake for at least 24 hours after they have eaten, allowing them to properly digest their meal.

Preventive Care

Monitoring the temperature and cleanliness of your snake's enclosure will help them maintain good health. To optimize your snake's health, make the following part of your daily routine:

- Check the enclosure temperature at least once daily or more often when the enclosure is first set up and during seasonal changes.
- Check for cleanliness on a weekly basis and remove feces and shed skin. Clean the enclosure completely once a month.
- Regularly check that the enclosure is secure with latches, knobs, etc.
- Keep notes about your snake's feeding (i.e. size of the meal, and if the meal was eaten/refused).

We recommend a yearly wellness exam for your snake to ensure optimum health at all life stages.