



Jungle Bob's Care Sheet California King Snake (*Lampropeltis californiae*)

General Information

The California King Snake has introduced generations of herp enthusiasts to snake-keeping and breeding, and remains immensely popular. Hardy and mild-mannered, it may attain 30+ years of age if provided proper care.

The huge range includes California, southern Oregon, southern Nevada, southern Utah, Arizona, and northern Mexico (Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora). An introduced population lives on Gran Canaria Island off northwestern Africa.



Forests, overgrown fields, grasslands, deserts, thorn scrub, swamps, farms, and suburban yards all provide suitable habitat for this adaptable snake.

California King Snake populations vary greatly in appearance. The pet trade recognizes two color phases, the desert and coastal. The desert phase is colored with black and white bands or is black with a white stripe. Coastal California king snakes are colored brown with yellow bands or a yellow stripe. The Black Desert Kingsnake, formerly a distinct species, is now classified as a color phase of the California King Snake. Hobbyists have produced an astonishing array of color and pattern morphs, as well as hybrids with Corn Snakes. Adults range from 2 ½ to just over 4 feet in length.

A 30-40 gallon aquarium makes a good home for a single adult. The tank's screen lid must be secured by cage clips. Temperatures should range from 77-82 F, with a basking site of 90 F. Provide your pet with the largest home possible, so that a thermal gradient (areas of different temperatures that allow the snake to regulate its metabolism) can be established. You can reach the desired temperatures with [Jungle Bob's Basking](#) and [Night Spot Bulbs](#). Reptile Heat Pads are also useful for creating basking sites, and as a night-time heat source. A great way to determine if your terrarium is at the correct temperature is to use the [Zoo Med Digital Terrarium Thermometer](#). The tank may be misted lightly on occasion, but otherwise should remain dry.

California King Snakes are best housed on [aspen, cypress mulch, pine bark or a similar substrate](#) that allows for burrowing. A terrarium liner, with a reptile cave for shelter, may also be employed.

Diet

King snakes feed on pinkie and fuzzy mice as babies and juveniles. As your snake grows it will soon move up to adult mice and small rats. We recommend that you feed baby and juvenile king snakes one time per week. Adult king snakes can be fed once every 7-10 days to maintain proper body weight. Like most snakes, king snakes typically will not eat when they are preparing to shed. Rodents can injure or kill your snake and should, therefore, be purchased frozen rather than live.

Other snakes are a favored food, so individuals housed together must be of equal size, and should be separated at feeding time to avoid "accidents".

Cleaning and Handling

The terrarium should be cleaned as necessary. Any fecal matter or uneaten food should be removed daily. A [Reptile Scoop](#) will simplify this task. The substrate should be completely changed once each month. The inside of the terrarium can be scrubbed with an appropriate reptile cage cleaner; we recommend [Natural Chemistry's Healthy Habitat](#).

California King Snakes tolerate gentle handling well, but like all reptiles they can bite when threatened; the snake's head should not be allowed near one's face. Although generally docile, they have the un-nerving habit of sometimes attempting an "experimental" bite upon the hand that holds them. This is easily avoided, as they rub their snouts against the area to be "sampled" beforehand. Always wash your hands before and after handling any animal.

Fun Fact

The "king" part of the common name derives from this powerful predator's habit of feeding upon other snakes, including venomous species. King Snakes have evolved immunity to the venom of at least some of the pit vipers that share their range.

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