

Honduran Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis*)

Difficulty: Easy



Honduran milksnakes are terrestrial snakes found primarily on the Caribbean half of Honduras, Nicaragua, and a little bit of Costa Rica. Their preferred habitat is moist broadleaf forest, also known as tropical rainforest.

Honduran milksnakes are known for their distinctive, attractive appearance: oval head, round pupils, slender body, and smooth, glossy scales. The wild type has a bright red base color with narrow bands of yellow-white sandwiched between thicker bands of black. The head is black with a thick yellow-white band behind the eyes and another one encircling the snout, giving the snake something of a mustache appearance. However, due to selective breeding in captivity, other colors and patterns are also available. Adult length is usually between 40-48”.

These snakes are diurnal, which means that they are primarily active during the day. Like other snakes, Honduran milksnakes are carnivorous, and they use this time to hunt down other snakes, lizards, eggs, and small birds and mammals.

Honduran milksnakes are some of the most popular pet snakes in the US due to their docile temperaments, hardiness, and attractive coloring. Expect your pet to live 20+ years with good care.

What You Need for a Bioactive Honduran Milksnake Enclosure:

- 48" L x 24" W x 24" H front-opening enclosure, or larger
- [Exo Terra Reptile Deep Dome Fixture Small](#), x2
- [Arcadia Halogen Heat Lamp, 50w](#), x2
- Plug-in lamp dimmer, x2
- [Arcadia Shade Dweller D3 7% UVB T5 Bulb + Fixture](#)
- [The Bio Dude Solar Grow 36" light and fixture](#)
- [Terra Fauna Bioactive Kit 40 breeder](#), x3
- [Ball Python Clean-Up Crew Pack](#)
- [4" Pot Large Tropicals 5-Pack](#)
- [Exo Terra 2qt Pressure Sprayer Mister](#)
- [Zoo Med Repti Fogger Terrarium Humidifier](#)
- [Exo Terra Corner Water Dish Large](#)
- [Thick climbing branches](#)
- [Cork logs](#)
- 2+ [hides/caves](#)
- [Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer](#), x2
- [Zoo Med Stainless Steel 10" Curved Feeding Tongs](#)

Terrarium Size

When it comes to choosing a terrarium for pet reptiles, keep in mind that larger is always better! Honduran milksnakes need enough room to fully stretch out and explore, which means that **the minimum enclosure size recommended for housing one adult Honduran milksnake is 48" L x 24" W x 24" H**, but larger is recommended if you have the space for it!

NOTE: Because milksnakes are snake-eaters, multiple milksnakes should not be housed in the same enclosure.

Lighting

Honduran milksnakes are diurnal (active during the day), so it's particularly beneficial to provide plenty of light during the daytime to help support their mental health. Although they are capable of surviving without UVB lighting, it's best practice to include it as part of the snake's setup so it can still reap the benefits. Our goal as good reptile keepers is not to simply allow our pets to survive — it is to do everything in our power to enable them to thrive. And there is mounting scientific evidence that UVB is, in fact, beneficial to milksnakes and other species.

We recommend installing one of the following UVB bulbs at the listed distance:

- **T8 Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0** — 7-9"
- **Arcadia Shade Dweller** — 9-11"
- **Arcadia T5 HO Forest 6%** — 12-15"
- **Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0** — 12-15"

Why do you need to pay attention to the distance between your snake and the basking platform/branch? It's because UVB strength decreases with distance from the bulb, so measuring distance is important to get the right exposure. The right basking UVI for a milksnake is 1.0-2.0. The abovementioned distances are an estimate, so it's best to check actual UVI strength with a Solarmeter 6.5 if you can.

The bulb must be mounted in a reflective fluorescent fixture, not an under-counter light fixture from the hardware store. The bulb must be long enough to cover about 1/2 of the enclosure's length and placed next to the heat lamps. So for a 48" long enclosure, you will want a 22-24" T5 HO bulb. Resist the temptation to use other brands — when it comes to UVB, *brand matters!*

If your enclosure has a mesh top, it's best to install the UVB fixture on top of the enclosure. If it does not, it's best to also install a mesh lamp guard such as the Arcadia LampGuardPro over it so the snake can't come in direct contact with the bulb.

Heating

Because milksnakes are reptiles, they need a range of temperatures within their enclosure so they can regulate their body temperature as needed. Areas of heat speed up their metabolism and promote activities like digestion and healing. Cool areas slow the metabolism and promote activities like rest and energy conservation.

Your Honduran milksnake's basking area should be between 85-90°F, and the cool side should be between 70-80°F. Create the basking area by placing a platform or sturdy branch below the lamps. Nighttime temperatures should not drop lower than 66°F.

Many milksnake keepers will recommend using heat pads as the snake's primary source of heat, but heat pads don't work well in a bioactive enclosure. Instead, use a couple of heat bulbs like the 50w Arcadia Halogen Basking Spot in small dome heat lamps. Plug the lamps into a rheostat or dimming thermostat so you can control them if they get too hot. Turning off your heat lamps should be enough to create the right nighttime temps, but if your house gets cold at night, you may need a ceramic heat emitter or radiant heat panel to supplement with lightless heat.

To monitor the temperatures in your snake's enclosure, place on digital probe thermometer in the basking area, and another on the floor of the cool end.

Humidity

Honduran milksnakes are a tropical species, so they need higher humidity levels. Target **60-80%** ambient humidity levels, which can be accomplished by using a humidity-friendly substrate, live plants, and misting the enclosure 1-2x/day — every night, and again in the morning if needed. In drier climates, you may also need to run a humidifier or fogger at night.

Additionally, your snake must have access to at least one humid hideout/burrow at all times. This hide should be placed on the cool half of the enclosure and lined with moistened sphagnum moss or substrate.

Substrate

To create a Honduran milksnake vivarium, you will need a bioactive-compatible substrate. That means things like aspen shavings or bark chips aren't going to work. You need a soil-like mix that mimics the conditions of your snake's natural habitat. You can try making your own with a basic mix of 60% plain topsoil and 40% coconut fiber, or you can let The Bio Dude do the work for you with the Terra Fauna Bioactive Kit.

Because you're setting up a bioactive habitat, you will need to mix and layer the substrate with sphagnum moss and leaf litter. For best results, combine with an appropriate amount of Bio Dude Bio Shot soil inoculant.

Finally, in order to make the substrate functional, make sure to add tropical CUC organisms like powder blue/orange isopods, dwarf white isopods, and springtails. You can also add other species like earthworms, super worms, and even a small millipede or two!

Decorating the Enclosure

Enclosure décor is more than just making your setup look nice. It's also an important part of providing *environmental enrichment* to your milksnake, which enhances your pet's quality of life by providing opportunities to express natural behaviors, explore, and exercise.

Here are some ideas for ways that you can decorate and enrich your milksnake's bioactive enclosure:

- ledges
- hollow logs
- cork flats
- thick, sturdy branches
- hides/caves
- tropical plants
- misc. décor

Make sure to arrange the enclosure in such a way that provides plenty of shade and cover to help the snake feel secure in its environment.

Feeding Your Honduran Milksnake

Milksnakes are obligate carnivores, which means that they *must* eat whole animals in order to get the nutrition they need. There is no replacement. Here is a rough sketch of how much and how often you should be feeding your snake, based on age:

- Hatchlings should be fed once every 5-7 days.
- Juveniles should be fed once every 7-10 days.
- Adults should be fed once every 10-14 days

Always feed your snake inside its enclosure, not outside. Contrary to the myth, feeding inside does not make snakes more aggressive. However, use feeding tweezers to offer the prey, not your hand, in order to prevent accidental strikes.

Variety is essential to complete nutrition. Aside from the usual mice and rats, you can add variety to your snake's diet with appropriately-sized hamsters, gerbils, chicks, quail, anoles, house geckos, and Reptilinks. If you have the opportunity to offer your milksnake an appropriately-sized, captive-bred snake as a feeder, do it! However, do not offer live prey if it can be avoided. Frozen feeders should be completely thawed to 75-100°F before offering.

Handling Tips

After bringing your new pet home, do not handle it until it is eaten regularly. This can take anywhere from two weeks to two months, so be patient and use this time to make sure your husbandry is on point. Once your snake is ready for handling, handle it at least 1-2x weekly to keep it accustomed to you, but no more than once daily. Handling is also a good way to encourage your snake to exercise and provide additional enrichment!

Wash Your Hands First

Before you pick up your snake, first wash your hands with soap or hand sanitizer. This removes potentially harmful bacteria, viruses, or parasites from your hands, as well as makes your hands smell distinctly inedible. Milksnakes are very enthusiastic predators, so if your hand smells like food, it might get treated like food.

How to Pick Up a Snake

Next, use a paper towel roll to tap its head (gently). This sets expectations by letting the snake know that it's time for handling, not food. Pick it up with two hands, one behind the head and one supporting the rest of the body. NEVER pick up a snake by its tail — this can really hurt their spine!

Safety with Snakes

Always supervise children closely when they are handling a pet snake (or any kind of pet, frankly). This is as much for the snake's safety as it is for the child's. Keep the snake's head away from your face, and always wash your hands and arms with soap or hand sanitizer after handling.

DO NOT Handle If...

Don't handle your snake within 48 hours of a meal, as this can stress them out and lead to regurgitation, which is a traumatic experience that can actually lead to death. Also do not handle if your pet's eyes have turned opaque or cloudy. This means that the snake is preparing to shed and can't see well, making them more jumpy than usual and more likely to bite out of self-defense.

Care information courtesy of [ReptiFiles](#).