

Texas Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri*)



Difficulty: Intermediate

Texas rat snakes are medium-large, semi-arboreal snakes found primarily in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. In the wild they can be found in a variety of habitats, including swampy areas, forests, prairies, and even rocky canyons. They are capable swimmers as well as climbers.

These snakes are diurnal, which means that they are primarily active during the day. Like other snakes, Texas rat snakes are carnivorous, and they use this time to hunt down a variety of prey, including frogs, lizards, birds, eggs, and rodents.

Texas rat snakes have a typical rat snake appearance, with an elongated head, round pupils, smooth scales, and a slender but robust body. This species is best known in the hobby for morphs, but their natural appearance in the wild is dark gray-black blotches on a yellowish to red-brown base. The head is dark, and the chin and belly are pale. Adult length is usually between 42-72", but they can get as long as 86".

Texas rat snakes can make great pets due to their energy and inquisitive natures. Expect your pet to live 20+ years with good care.

What You Need for a Bioactive Texas Rat Snake Enclosure:

- 72" L x 24"W x 36"H front-opening enclosure, or larger
- [Exo Terra Reptile Deep Dome Fixture, large](#), x2
- [75w Arcadia Halogen Heat Lamp](#), x2
- Plug-in lamp dimmer, x2
- [4'x 2' x 2' Terra Firma Bioactive Kit](#), x2
- [Corn Snake Clean Up Crew Pack](#), x2
- [40 Breeder Terra Firma Premium Plant Kit](#), x2
- [Exo Terra 2qt Pressure Sprayer Mister](#)
- [Exo Terra Corner Water Dish Large](#)
- Thick climbing branches
- Cork logs
- 2+ [hides/caves](#)

Terrarium Size

When it comes to choosing a terrarium for pet reptiles, keep in mind that larger is always better! Texas rat snakes are active snakes that appreciate having plenty of room to stretch out, climb, and explore, and they quickly get bored and lethargic in small or sparse enclosures. **Based on the average size of a Texas rat snake, the minimum enclosure size recommendation is 72" L x 24"W x 36"H**, but larger is strongly recommended if you have the space for it!

Multiple Texas rat snakes should not be housed in the same enclosure.

Lighting

Texas rat snakes are diurnal, so it's particularly beneficial to provide plenty of light during 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 rat snakes and other species.

Therefore **we recommend installing an Arcadia Forest 6% or Zoo Med Reptisun T5 HO 5.0 UVB bulb in a reflective fluorescent fixture**, long enough to cover about 1/2 of the enclosure's length and placed next to the heat lamps on the warm side. So for a 72" long enclosure, you will need a bulb about 34" long. Do not 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. The basking surface should be placed 11-13" below the lamp.

- [34" Arcadia Forest 6% UVB bulb](#)
- [36" Bio Dude Solar Grow fixture](#)
- [22" Bio Dude Glow & Grow LED lamp](#), x2
- [Bio Dude Digital Thermometer / Hygrometer](#), x2
- [Zoo Med Stainless Steel 10" Curved Feeding Tongs](#)

Heating

Because Texas rat snakes are reptiles, they need a range of temperatures within their enclosure so they can regulate their own 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 Texas rat snake's basking area should be around 86°F, and the cool side should be around 75°F.

Create the basking area by placing a platform or sturdy branch below the lamps.

Many rat snake keepers will recommend using heat pads as the snake's primary source of heat, but heat pads don't work well in a bioactive setup. Instead, use a couple of heat bulbs like the 75w Arcadia Halogen Basking Spot in small dome heat lamps. Plug each heat lamp into a lamp dimmer or dimming thermostat so you can control them if they get too hot. If air temperatures are too low, a radiant heat panel may be needed to bump things up.

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

Texas rat snakes are adaptable and capable of surviving drier conditions, but at very least, they still need access to humid microclimates in order to stay hydrated, keep their lungs healthy, and shed their skin properly. To be specific, **they should have access to a humid hideout at all times**. This hide should be placed on the cool half of the enclosure and lined with moistened sphagnum moss or substrate.

It's also best practice to mist the enclosure with a pressure sprayer 1-2x/week and provide a water bowl or tub large enough to accommodate the snake's entire body. Ideally, it should be large enough to allow for some swimming, or swimming can be offered as a separate enrichment activity.

Don't forget to water your plants as needed!

Substrate

To create a Texas rat snake 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 make your own with 80% plain topsoil and 20% play sand, or you can let The Bio Dude do the work for you with two 4' x 2' x 2' Terra Firma Bioactive Kits!

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.

Finally, in order to make the substrate functional, make sure to add semi-arid CUC organisms like powder blue/orange isopods, dwarf white isopods, and springtails. You can also add other species like mealworms, super worms, and earthworms!

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 Texas rat snake, 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 rat snake's bioactive enclosure:

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

Feeding Your Texas Rat Snake

Texas rat snakes 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 hamsters, gerbils, chicks, quail, eggs, anoles, house geckos, and Reptilinks. 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

Wild-caught Texas rat snakes can be intolerant of handling and happiest as display animals, so it's important to keep in mind that regular handling may not be a possibility with this species. However, captive-bred Texas rat snakes are likely to be more tolerant of humans and handling, particularly with appropriate training and after they age past their defensive baby stage.

Here are some general tips for handling snakes:

- Do not handle your new pet until it's eating regularly.
- Wash your hands before and after handling with soap or hand sanitizer.
- Gently tap the snake with a paper towel roll to get it out of "food mode."
- Pick up the snake's body with both hands.
- Handle it at least 1-2x weekly to keep it accustomed to you, but no more than once daily.
- Do not handle within 48 hours of a meal or if it's preparing to shed.

Care information courtesy of [ReptiFiles](#).

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