

**The Corn Snake** *Latin name: originally Elaphe guttata (now Pantherophis guttatus)*

Corn snakes belong to the Colubrid family, the largest snake family. As hatchlings, they normally measure 20-28cms (8-11in). Adults range from 1-1½ m (3-5ft) with males generally being longer than females. Their lifespan is up to 20 years and they are non venomous.



## Facts & Information

**Origin:** Corn Snakes are native to the South Eastern United States, where they are found in open woods and grassland. They are common around farms and in cornfields, where they help to control rodents.

**Benefits of keeping:** Corn snakes are hardy and easy to keep. They are docile and even tempered and well-suited to captive conditions. They become tame with regular gentle handling. They do not grow very big compared to other species and are the ideal first snake.

Corn snakes are beautiful, dramatic-looking snakes, they have a background colour of orange, with black-bordered irregular red or rust coloured patches. Their belly is white with black squares on it. However, due to the ease with which they breed in captivity, many colour variations are now available, including blood red corns, striped corns and albino corns.

**Housing:** It is advisable to start with a small pen such as an Exo Terra Faunarium for a hatchling, as Corn snakes are the “Houdini” of the snake world. They will find a way out of the tiniest hole, so a plastic container is best initially. This can be placed inside an Exo Terra Terrarium to ensure the correct temperature and then move them into the terrarium itself when they grow to about 60cm (2ft) at about 1 year old.

Corn snakes can be housed together or separately, although some males will object to sharing a vivarium with another male. Females can be housed together but should be separated for feeding as animals frequently compete for the same food item and may even try to eat each other!

**Substrate and Furnishings:** Bark or wood shavings are ideal as a substrate. It is a good idea to provide a hide at both the cooler end of the terrarium and the hotter end so as to give the snake a choice of warm security or cooler security. The Exo Terra Snake Cave is perfect for this, or a Reptile Den which sticks to the glass, allowing you to look at your snake without disturbing them. If rocks are to be used to decorate the terrarium then ensure that there are no sharp edges, and that they cannot fall and crush your snake. A climbing branch would be appreciated by the snake and artificial plants and other terrarium décor will enhance the appearance of your set-up. Remove all droppings and clean the terrarium on a regular basis to prevent disease.

**Heating:** Corn snakes need a hot area of about 90 F (32 C) with a background daytime temperature of 80 F (27 C). At night, the temperature should drop to about 70 F (21 C). One of the best methods of heating for Corn snakes is an Exo Terra Heat Rock. Choose an appropriate size for your terrarium and position towards one end of it. This allows for the required temperature gradient. A digital thermometer should be placed near the hot end and one at the cool end of the terrarium to check the temperatures are correct.

**Lighting:** Unlike many reptiles, corn snakes do not need special UVA or UVB lighting as they have developed to be mostly nocturnal. In fact too much UV light is detrimental to albinos and can cause eye problems. An incandescent daylight bulb (Sun Glo) or a ReptiGlo 2.0 fluorescent tube, set on a timer to give 10-12hours daylight, can be used. (The Reptglo 2.0 does not have high levels of UVB). A Night Glo bulb could be used to assist nocturnal viewing if desired

**Humidity:** Humidity is not a critical keeping factor, except when the snake is in the run up to sloughing its skin. At that time, try to keep humidity at 60% or higher by giving a light misting once a day with a simple hand sprayer. This will promote a clean, healthy skin slough.

**Water:** A shallow, heavy bowl of clean water that the snake cannot tip over should be provided. The bowl should be large enough for the snake to soak in. Corn snakes do not soak frequently but they will do so on occasions, especially during a skin slough, and sometimes after feeding.

**Diet and Feeding:** In the wild, Corn snakes would take a variety of prey items including small mammals, lizards, and birds. In captivity, they almost always accept defrosted mice and young rats, of appropriate size, without a problem. Always purchase an animal with an established feeding regime and don't be tempted to take on the additional responsibility of an erratic feeder.

Hatchlings should be fed a defrosted pinkie (baby mouse) every four to six days and adults a mouse or young rat no more than once every seven to ten days. The width of the prey item should not exceed about one-and-a-half times the width of the snake's head. Don't try to make your snake grow faster by overfeeding as it will become obese and associated health problems may follow. Because of their slow metabolism, an overweight snake will take a very long time to lose excess fat, so it is best to prevent the problem occurring in the first place.

**Salmonella:** Like all living things, snakes can carry the naturally occurring bacteria Salmonella, which can be acquired by ingestion (via the mouth). Good hygiene is therefore very important when keeping any animal. Remember, you are more likely to acquire Salmonella from raw chicken meat, a stale cream cake or a dog so don't automatically assume that your snake is the only suspect!

Always wash your hands after handling ALL animals.

**Shedding:** From time to time a snake sheds the entire outer layer of its skin, a process referred to as sloughing. Youngsters go through this process more frequently, about every month to six weeks, than adults, who may only slough three or four times a year. The skin should be sloughed off as a complete skin and if any bits are left on the snake this can kill the new skin underneath and cause future problems. Always check the snake for retained skin, especially the tip of the tail and the "spectacles" (the bit covering the eyes). A gentle bath in warm water will usually free the stuck skin that can then be gently picked off. If in doubt see your local reptile vet or specialist who will be able to advise you.

There are some excellent books on keeping corn snakes and you should purchase one or more of these to read before you buy your pet. You should also consider joining your local reptile society who will be happy to offer help and advice.

Don't forget to register your new pet with a local Vet. You can find your local Veterinary practice and what species they treat at [www.findavet.org.uk](http://www.findavet.org.uk). Many general practices now treat reptiles, or they can refer you to a more specialist Vet if required.

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## The Bearded Dragon *Latin name: Pogona vitticeps*

Bearded dragons are lizards of the Agama family. They are about 7 cm (3inches) long when they hatch and grow to their adult size of 45-60cm (18-24in) in about 1 year. Females are normally smaller than males. They come in a wide variety of colours including shades of brown, grey and orange. Bearded dragons are so called because their spiny throat projections look similar to a human beard. The male's beard is typically darker than the female's and it can be puffed up in a display of dominance. Their lifespan is 8 – 10 years.



### Facts & Information

**Origin:** Bearded dragons are native to Central Australia, where they are found in semi-arid woodlands and rocky deserts. They are skilled climbers and spend the morning and evening basking on an exposed rock or branch. They take refuge from the hottest part of the day.

**Benefits of keeping:** Bearded dragons adapt well to being handled and are one of the easiest lizards to tame. Gentle, regular handling of young ones is beneficial, as a dragon will learn to recognize its keeper. They are hardy and relatively easy to keep,. They have good activity levels during the day and an out-going personality with interesting social behaviour. Males “head bob” rapidly in a display of dominance, while females respond with a slower head bob. Both sexes will wave with a front leg to appease more dominant animals. All of this makes them one of the best lizards for beginners to keep.

**Housing:** A larger Exo Terra Terrarium is suitable for 1 or 2 young bearded dragons. They can be kept singly, in pairs or in groups, with only one male per group as they will fight. Males are slightly larger than females and have a row of enlarged femoral pores running along the inner thigh. Groups will live happily together in larger enclosures while hatchlings up to 4-5 months old may be kept in a smaller terrarium.

**Substrate and Furnishings:** Bearded dragons need a desert environment, so Exo Terra Desert Sand is ideal as a substrate. Remove all droppings and clean terrariums on a regular basis to prevent disease. Dragons do climb and logs and rocks make good basking areas, as long as they are fixed securely. A hide or something to shelter behind is essential. This helps to prevent stress and allow the bearded dragon a safe haven from the outside world.

**Heating:** A daytime basking area of around 100°F (38°C) is essential, as are cool areas ranging from 68-84°F (20-29°C) Note: No extra night heat is needed for adult dragons if the room stays above 16°C (60°F). A basking lamp is the best heat source as dragons are attracted to light; Exo Terra Sun Glo Basking Spotlights are suitable, set on a timer to give 12 hours light and heat per day.

Larger enclosures may need ceramic heaters as well. Wire mesh guards should be fitted over all heat sources used in order to prevent thermal burns. An Exo Terra Heat Rock may also be used. Choose an appropriate size for your terrarium and position towards one end of it, underneath the Repti Glo 10 bulb and basking lamp. This allows for the required temperature gradient. Digital thermometers should be placed near the basking spot and at the cool end of the terrarium to check the temperatures.

In the autumn and winter, as daylight hours shorten, some adult Bearded Dragons seek cooler areas and become dormant for weeks or even months (this is called brumation). Feeding will cease and once they have begun to sleep all day, background temperatures may be safely reduced to 60-70°F (16 - 21°C) and basking lamps turned down until the dragons awaken and start basking and feeding again in early spring.

**Lighting:** As well as needing good bright lighting in the form of a spotlight, dragons need ultraviolet light (UVA for normal vision and activity levels and UVB for normal calcium metabolism), which must be supplied by specialist reptile UV lamps or tubes. A high-UVB fluorescent tube, such as Exo Terra Repti-Glo 10.0 ideally fitted with reflectors, should be used to supplement the lighting. These should also be fitted to a timer to give 12 hours light/day. These must be replaced every year, even though they may look fine, as all fluorescent bulbs lose their UV radiation within one year. Exo Terra canopies provide an easy solution to lighting your terrarium.

**Water:** A shallow bowl of clean water must always be provided. Dragons can take time to learn to drink from a dish. As they are attracted to water movement, a dripper system may work, or they can be regularly offered a syringe filled with water, dripped on the lizard's head or in front of its nose. This way they learn to lap from the nozzle. Babies can be gently sprayed and will drink the droplets.

**Diet and Feeding:** Bearded dragons are omnivorous. A balanced diet must include green leaves (eg. spring greens, kale, dandelion, watercress) vegetables (eg. chopped red pepper, peas, grated butternut squash, carrot) insects (eg. black or brown crickets, locusts, mealworms) Feed juveniles twice daily; offer adults fresh green food daily and insects every 1-2 days.

As an occasional treat, fruit can be given (eg. apples, bananas, kiwi, grapes). Too much can cause diarrhoea. Baby dragons can become seriously impacted (gut blockage) by large insects and should be fed only small crickets no bigger than the distance between the dragon's eyes. They should not be fed mealworms.

All insects should be well fed so that they contain maximum nutritional value when fed to the dragons. They normally come with food, such as bran, in the container. Once or twice a week, before offering them to the lizards, insects should be dusted with good quality reptile mineral/vitamin supplement powder. Exo Terra cricket feeders are perfect as a container to dust them in and then use to allow slow release into the terrarium. Dragons will benefit from having a small dish of calcium (calcium carbonate powder or grated cuttlefish) in their terrarium.

Exo Terra make a complete dry pellet diet for both Juvenile and Adult Bearded Dragons.

**Salmonella:** Like all living things reptiles can carry the naturally occurring bacteria Salmonella, which can be acquired by ingestion (via the mouth). Good hygiene is therefore very important when keeping any animal. Remember, you are more likely to acquire Salmonella from raw chicken meat, a stale cream cake or a dog, so don't automatically assume that your reptile is the only suspect!

Always wash your hands after handling ALL animals.

**Shedding:** Bearded dragons shed their skin naturally as they grow. This will be up to 8-10 times in the first year and several times a year after that. They go off their food for a few days before shedding. It will peel off in strips. Misting them with water will help with this process.

There are some excellent books on keeping bearded dragons and you should purchase one or more of these to read before you buy your pet. You should also consider joining your local reptile society who will be happy to offer help and advice.

Don't forget to register your new pet with a local Vet. You can find your local Veterinary practice and what species they treat at [www.findavet.org.uk](http://www.findavet.org.uk). Many general practices now treat reptiles, or they can refer you to a more specialist Vet if required.

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## The Leopard Gecko *Latin name: Eublepharis macularis*

Leopard Geckos are about 6cm (2.5in) long when they hatch and grow to an adult size of 20-25cm (8-10ins). Their common name comes from the adult colouration of the wild species, which is normally yellow/cream with black spots. Leopard Geckos are one of the few gecko species with eyelids, hence their Latin name (Eublepharis = "Good(True) Eyelid"). A healthy gecko has a fat tail, and you should avoid buying one with a thin tail. Their lifespan is 8 years or more.



### Facts & Information

**Origin:** Leopard Geckos are native to Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran, where they are found in harsh, arid mountain and desert regions. They are nocturnal, ground dwelling lizards and they take cover during the heat of the day. They do not have the adhesive toe pads of other geckos.

**Benefits of keeping:** Leopard Geckos are ideal lizards for the first time keeper as they do not grow particularly big, are very hardy, easy to keep and very attractive looking. They are ideal for older children as they are placid and soon become accustomed to handling. They require little maintenance and the overall costs involved are low which also makes them highly recommended for beginners.

Leopard Geckos have been bred in captivity for many years resulting in many interesting colour variations and are the most common lizard kept. Rough handling can occasionally cause a Leopard Gecko to shed its tail and while this will re-grow in time, it will not look as nice as the old one.

**Housing:** It is possible to start with a small pen such as an Exo Terra Faunarium for a hatchling and then upgrade to a Terrarium when they grow larger. They can be kept singly, in pairs, or in groups, but as males are aggressive, only 1 male per group. There is only slight difference between male and females in appearance. Males are slightly more heavy-bodied and have a row of enlarged femoral pores running along the inner thigh.

**Substrate and Furnishings:** As these geckos originate from very arid conditions it is important to provide a suitable environment. Exo Terra sand is ideal as a substrate. Larger stones can be added to create a more realistic rocky, desert terrain.

At least one hide per gecko should be included, as it is important that they have the option to hide and have their own space if required. Remove all droppings and clean the terrarium on a regular basis to prevent disease.

**Heating:** Leopard geckos need a hot area of about 90 F (32 C) with a background daytime temperature of 80 F (27 C). At night, temperature should drop to about 70 F (21 C). This is when they move about most and feed.

One of the best methods of heating for Leopard Geckos is an Exo Terra Heat Rock. Choose an appropriate size for your terrarium and position towards one end of it, underneath the basking lamp if used. This allows for the required temperature gradient. A digital thermometer should be placed near the hot end and one at the cool end of the terrarium to check the temperatures are correct. A light source, such as a SunGlo Basking Light could also be used

as a heat source. This should be fitted to a timer to give 12 hours light/day and this will help with the temperature drop required at nighttime.

**Lighting:** Unlike many reptiles, they do not need special UVA or UVB lighting as they have developed to be mostly nocturnal. In fact, too much UVB can cause them eye problems. An incandescent daylight bulb (Sun Glo) or a ReptiGlo 2.0 fluorescent tube, set on a timer to give 12 hours daylight, can be used. (The Reptiglo 2.0 does not have high levels of UVB). A Night Glo bulb could be used to assist nocturnal viewing if desired. Exo Terra canopies provide an easy solution to lighting your terrarium.

**Water:** Geckos do not require much water, but a shallow bowl of clean water should be provided. Young ones can be gently sprayed and will drink the droplets.

**Diet and Feeding:** Feeding Leopard Geckos is very easy. They will take a wide variety of insects, crickets are their main food but they will also eat small locusts, wax worms and mealworms (only feed the latter in small quantities). Feed baby geckos a good meal every other day and adults two/three times a week. It is important not to over feed and to make sure that all the food has been eaten before you offer more. Make sure the crickets you feed are not too big, a good guide is to feed ones no bigger than the distance between the gecko's eyes.

All insects should be well fed so that they contain maximum nutritional value when fed to the geckos. They normally come with food, such as bran, in the container. Once a week, before offering them to the lizards, insects should be dusted with good quality reptile mineral/vitamin supplement powder. Exo Terra cricket feeders are perfect as a container to dust them in and then use it to allow their slow release into the terrarium. Leopard geckos will benefit from having a small dish of calcium (calcium carbonate powder or grated cuttlefish) available at all times.

**Salmonella:** Like all living things reptiles can carry the naturally occurring bacteria Salmonella, which can be acquired by ingestion (via the mouth). Good hygiene is therefore very important when keeping any animal. Remember, you are just as likely to acquire Salmonella from raw chicken meat, a stale cream cake or a dog so don't automatically assume that your reptile is the only suspect!

Always wash your hands after handling ALL animals.

**Shedding:** The most common problem with Leopard Geckos is with skin shedding. Like all reptiles, Leopard Geckos shed the outside layer of skin regularly but, unlike snakes, the discarded skin is normally eaten and is rarely seen. On occasion, however, the skin can become stuck around their toes or eyes. If you see your gecko is having problems shedding give it a spray with tepid water, or place it in a separate box with some damp kitchen roll. If this does not work seek further advice from your pet shop, reptile society or breeder. A shedding box with damp moss or vermiculite should be provided and could also double up as an additional hide

There are some excellent books on keeping leopard geckos and you should purchase one or more of these to read before you buy your pet. You should also consider joining your local reptile society who will be happy to offer help and advice.

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**Hermann's Tortoise** *Latin name: Testudo hermanni*

Hermann's tortoises are one of the smaller Mediterranean tortoises, belonging to the same Genus (*Testudo*) as the Greek tortoise and the Marginated tortoise. Hatchlings are around 4cm (1½in) in length and they grow annually to a maximum adult length of about 20cm (8in). Their lifespan is 70 years or more.



**Facts & Information**

**Origin:** They originate from the Northern shores of the Mediterranean and spread northwards into central Europe through suitable habitat areas. They like arid, rocky hills and scrubland.

European tortoises are protected by EU and global law. Only captive bred ones should be bought. They must be sold with an Article 10 Exemption Certificate, which should be kept throughout their lifetime.

**Benefits of keeping:** They are ideal tortoises for the first time keeper, being fairly hardy and doing well in our UK climate, with a little care and attention at certain times of the year. They can be quite sociable and are easily handled. A well thought out tortoise pen is an attractive addition to any garden. Initial cost to buy is high, although maintenance and feeding is straightforward and inexpensive. Unlike most pets, where their short lifespan is a problem, tortoises are extremely long-lived.

**Housing:** Hatchlings and young tortoises can be housed indoors in a Terrarium or an open topped container. They should be given access to an outside pen on warm days. Adults kept outside in a secure wooden pen should have access to full sun, with retreat areas to give security and shade. They should be brought indoors in winter and hibernated in a box if appropriate.

**Substrate and Furnishings:** Hatchlings housed inside are best kept on a substrate of newspaper, bark chips or beech chip that is easily changed when soiled. Some form of hide should be provided. This could be something quite simple, like a handful of hay that the tortoise can burrow into and make itself feel a little more secure.

A mix of ground surfaces would be appreciated by your tortoise, perhaps both a small paved area and an area of grass, with shade and cover provided by low-growing shrubs. A simple overnight box that gives protection from rain and cold and easily accessed by your tortoise as and when it wishes, should be provided. This should be filled with hay.

**Heating:** For hatchlings indoors, a background temperature of about 70F (21C) with an overhead heat bulb 15-30cm above your tortoise, providing a basking spot of about 90F (32C) at one end of the housing would be ideal. Ensure that your tortoise can move away from the basking area and sit in a cooler area of the cage if it wishes. The basking lamp, such as a SunGlo Daylight Basking Lamp is necessary to mimic the heat of the sun and should be left on for 13 hours a day. Any electric heating device must be controlled by an appropriate thermostat. It is advisable to have a thermometer at each end of the terrarium, so it is easy to monitor the temperature at both the warmer and cooler end.

For adults housed outside, no additional heating is required if the pen gets full sun for part of (or most of) the day. You could also provide a warmer spot using a sheet of glass over part of the pen to maximise the heat of the sun. Again, they must have an area of shade that they can retreat into as required.

**Lighting:** Tortoises need UVA and UVB light for healthy shell and bone growth. While they will get this naturally from sunlight if in an outdoor pen, for tortoises housed indoors a fluorescent UVB source, such as Repti-Glo 5.0, is essential. These must be replaced every year, even though they may look fine, as all fluorescent bulbs lose their UV radiation within one year. A Daylight Basking Lamp should also be used, as mentioned above.

**Humidity:** Humidity should be avoided with Hermann's tortoises as a damp habitat can increase the risk of breathing problems. Water spillages should be mopped up and the housing should be well ventilated, without draughts.

**Water:** A shallow dish of water must be available at all times for your tortoise to both drink from and bathe in as it wishes. The dish must be selected carefully to avoid frequent spillages, which would increase the humidity, and to ensure that the tortoise can climb both in and out of the dish. An Exo-Terra water dish is ideal. It is a good idea to periodically give your tortoise a 10 minute bath in shallow tepid water

**Diet and Feeding:** Hermann's tortoises are herbivores and should not be fed any meat product or derivative. Ideally you would be able to fresh pick food daily from your garden that has not been treated with any pesticides. The staple diet is dandelion leaves, flowers and stalks but, for variety, you could also offer plantain, clover, convulvulus, and honeysuckle. Cabbage, kale, cucumber, courgette, watercress and the occasional tomato, kiwi, etc. will also all be taken by your tortoise. Some garden plants are poisonous, so check before giving anything else. All food should be well washed in cold water to remove any pesticide residues. Calcium carbonate (limestone flour) and a good vitamin/ mineral supplement should be added to food items.

Exo Terra make a nutritionally complete pellet diet for Adult tortoises (not juveniles). Every day you should remove any uneaten food and waste matter and offer fresh food and water.

**Hibernation:** Tortoises will hibernate for several months over the winter (for longer as they get older). Their heart rate and breathing drop considerably. It is vital that tortoises are only allowed hibernated if they are completely healthy and have enough body reserves to last the winter, or they will die. There are recognised length:weight ratios to help work this out. They should be checked and weighed by a vet or reptile expert before deciding to hibernate them. They should be kept in an insulated wooden box, kept at about 5C, with a maximum/minimum thermometer to check the temperature. It must not reach freezing point. It is vital to get detailed information about how to hibernate them and what to do when they awaken, to avoid serious health problems.

There are some excellent books on keeping tortoises and you should purchase one or more of these to read before you buy your pet. You should also consider joining your local Chelonian society who will be happy to offer help and advice.

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