

garter and water snakes care sheet



These snakes are found throughout North America and seldom wander very far from the water. Some species are known to be snappy but do calm down with frequent handling. They require a habitat that is large for their size.

facts

average adult size:	2 to 5 feet long, depending on species
average life span:	up to 10+ year with proper care, depending on species
diet:	carnivore

Will reach adult size in 1 to 3 years, under ideal conditions; upgrade habitat size as your snake grows.



Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

diet

A well-balanced garter or water snake diet consists of:

- Comet goldfish, gut-loaded (recently fed) crickets and earthworms.
- Long-term use of comet goldfish as the sole food source can cause a vitamin B1 deficiency. Be sure to vary your snake's diet for optimal nutrition.
- May feed on frozen/thawed rodents, such as pinkies. Do not use a microwave to defrost frozen rodents and do not prepare them in the same area that you prepare food. If it is unavoidable, be sure to thoroughly disinfect the area. See the Feeding Frozen/Thawed Foods Care Sheet for more information.

feeding

Things to remember when feeding your garter or water snake:

- Feed juveniles every other day, adults once a week.
- Place comet goldfish in snake's water bowl for feeding.
- Fresh, clean, chlorine-

free water should be available at all times in a bowl large enough for your snake to soak in.

housing

- Size - Appropriately sized and shaped habitat for a baby garter or water snake to accommodate normal behavior and exercise, at least 20L. A 40B tank is recommended for an adult garter or water snake.
- Substrate - Provide a deep substrate, such as reptile bark, coconut fiber bedding or sphagnum moss. Keep substrate dry to prevent skin blisters and sores.
- Habitat - Provide multiple hiding places and foliage for hiding and climbing in. Maintain 40 to 60% humidity; higher during shedding.
- Temperature - temperature gradient (85°F for the warm end and 70° for the cool end); recommend radiant heat. Provide a basking area that reaches about 95°F to aid digestion.
- Lighting - Provide 8 to 12 hours of light daily; don't

leave white light on at all times; a nocturnal or infrared light should be used at night.

- Water - Provide a large bowl of fresh, chlorine-free water for drinking and swimming; change daily.
- Do not house different snake species together.

normal behavior

- As your snake gets ready to shed, their eyes will turn a milky blue/grey over the course of a few days and their body color will start to dull and develop a whitish sheen. May become irritable; avoid handling if possible.
- Can be very active in their habitat; escape artists.

habitat maintenance

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the habitat at least once a week: place snake in a secure habitat; scrub the tank and furnishings with a 3% bleach solution; rinse thoroughly with water, removing all traces of bleach smell; dry the tank and furnishings

completely and add clean substrate.

grooming and hygiene

- Snakes will regularly shed their skin; ensure humidity of habitat is at appropriate level to allow snake to shed properly.

signs of a healthy animal

- Active and alert
- Clear eyes (except when shedding)
- Eats regularly
- Healthy skin
- Regularly sheds skin in one complete piece
- Free of mites and ticks

red flags

- Unusually frequent or infrequent shedding
- Vomiting
- Lethargic or reluctant to eat
- Abnormal feces
- Bumps or spots on skin
- Labored breathing
- Difficulty shedding
- White, cheesy substance in mouth

common health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Dermatitis	Blisters, rapid shedding caused by an unclean habitat or one that is too cold or damp.	Consult your veterinarian, clean the habitat and lower humidity.
Respiratory disease	Labored breathing, mucus in mouth or nostrils. Can be caused by a habitat that is too cold or damp.	Consult your veterinarian and keep snake warm and dry.
Stomatitis	White, cheesy substance in the mouth, loss of teeth and appetite. If untreated, can be fatal.	Immediately consult your veterinarian.
Ticks and mites	Parasites on skin, can transmit disease.	Consult your veterinarian.

If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.

shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- Substrate
- Moss
- Large water dish
- Hideaway place
- Climbing décor
- Plants
- Heat light/emitter
- Heat fixture
- Under-tank heater (optional)
- Thermometer
- Humidity gauge
- Book about garter and water snakes

sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on garter and water snakes and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all reptiles are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your reptile or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for reptiles and should consider not having a reptile as a pet.

Go to cdc.gov/healthypets and petco.com/caresheet for more information about reptiles and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to petco.com for more information.

