

Rosy Boa (*Lichanura sp.*)

Difficulty: Easy

Rosy boas are a 17-44"/43-111cm long species of snake with a refined oblong head, robust body, small eyes, vertical pupils, smooth scales, and cloacal spurs. Expected adult length varies by locality. Coloring varies based on locality, but generally there are two types of rosy boa: one with red-brown to orange stripes on an off-white to pale gray-blue background, and the other with dark brown or black stripes on a white to cream background. All rosy boas have three broad stripes running down the length of the body.

Rosy boas are native to the southwestern United States, the Baja peninsula, and northwestern Sonora, Mexico. They are most often found in scrub, dry woodlands, rocky slopes, and desert to semi-desert areas near a consistent source of water. They are terrestrial and nocturnal in habit, and like to hide in rodent burrows and in rock crevices.

Although not particularly common in the pet trade, rosy boas can make great pets. They're low-maintenance, manageably-sized, and generally tolerate handling well. If you pay attention to providing excellent rosy boa care, your pet may be able to live 30+ years.

Shopping List

- 36"L x 18"W x 18"H reptile enclosure (preferably front-opening)
- Dual dome heat lamp with ceramic sockets
- 50w halogen flood bulb, x2
- Plug-in lamp dimmer, x2
- Flat basking stone
- Infrared thermometer ("temperature gun")
- Digital probe thermometer
- 22" T5 HO forest UVB bulb (Arcadia or Zoo Med brand)
- 24" T5 HO light fixture with reflector
- Pressure sprayer
- Surge protector with digital timer
- >3" sand substrate
- Reptile hides/caves (at least 2)
- Environmental enrichment items (hollow logs, sturdy branches, live/fake plants, etc.)
- Small water bowl
- Feeding tongs

Housing

Because rosy boas' adult size varies so widely based on their genetics, it's best to figure out what species and locality of rosy boas you have/plan on getting so you can plan the enclosure size accordingly. **The**

formula for calculating a snake's minimum space needs is *snake length x half snake length x half snake length = length x width x height*.

For example, if you use this formula and you have a rosy boa that is expected to only grow 24" long, then the minimum acceptable enclosure size will be 24"L x 12"W x 12"H. Alternatively, if you use this formula and you have a rosy boa that is expected to grow up to 44" long, then you will need a 48"L x 24"W x 24"H enclosure.

Of course, using a larger enclosure than the minimum is strongly recommended. Bigger is always better!

Can multiple rosy boas snakes be housed together?

Rosy boas are not known to be significantly social animals, so it's best to house only one per enclosure.

Lighting & UVB

Rosy boas are nocturnal, which means that they are most active around nighttime. They are capable of surviving without UVB light, but it's important to remember that they can't thrive without it. This helps regulate their day/night cycle and associated hormonal rhythms, as well as provides all of the vitamin D3 they can possibly need, supporting all associated physiological processes.

Lights should be on for 14 hours/day during summer and 10 hours/day during winter, with gradual adjustments in-between to encourage healthy hormonal cycling.

UVB Lighting

UVB lighting can be tricky, because in order to get the right strength of UVB (UV Index, or UVI), distance and potential mesh obstruction must be considered. To provide appropriate UVB, you will need a high-quality, low-intensity UVB bulb, 1/3 to 1/2 the length of the enclosure, placed on the warm side of the setup. The basking platform/branch should be placed as follows:

- Arcadia ShadeDweller kit: 7-9" (mesh), 10-12" (no mesh)
- Arcadia T5 HO 6% / Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0: 10-12" (mesh), 13-15" (no mesh)

(These recommendations are approximations based on available data. For best results, use a Solarmeter 6.5 to determine the best placement to achieve a UVI of 2.0-3.0 in the basking area.)

Heating

Humans are *warm-blooded*, which means that our body temperature is automatically regulated. Rosy boas, however, are *cold-blooded*, which means that they have to move between areas of different temperatures in order to regulate their body temperature. In captivity, using halogen flood heat bulbs is the best way to replicate the type of warmth provided by sunlight.

- **Basking surface: 85-90°F (29-32°C)**
- **Cool zone: 75-80°F (24-27°C)**

Heating should be turned off at night. Temperatures can safely fall to 60°F/16°C.

Generally speaking, 50w halogen flood bulbs should be plenty to achieve your target basking surface temperature. The basking rock should be placed on top of the black plastic hide box, which will act as your warm hide. If you notice that they're getting too hot, dial it down with a plug-in lamp dimmer. If your basking surface is too cool, you need higher wattage bulbs.

You will need multiple heat bulbs to create a large enough basking area to evenly heat your snake's coiled body. Two bulbs should be enough for an average rosy boa.

To measure the basking surface temperature, use an infrared thermometer (a.k.a. temperature gun). To measure the temperature of the warm hide, use a digital probe thermometer. The Etekcity 774 is a good infrared thermometer, and most reptile-brand digital probe thermometers function well.

Annual winter cooling/brumation is recommended for this species.

Humidity

Rosy boas are very sensitive to living in an excessively wet environment, so ambient humidity should be kept lower than 60%, as measured by a digital probe hygrometer with the probe place in the middle of the enclosure. Humidity levels that are consistently higher than this range may make your pet unwell, although it is normal for humidity to be higher on the cool end and lower on the warm end, as well as higher at night.

That being said, rosy boas' sensitivity to moisture in their environment is often exaggerated. They *do* need consistent access to water, and they are perfectly capable of surviving occasional spikes of humidity (ex: rain) as long their environment is allowed to dry out afterward. Furthermore, rosy boas are known to hang out under rocks and in burrows, where humidity is often significantly higher than ambient.

To keep your rosy boa hydrated without keeping it wet, it should have access to a humid hide for use as desired. This should be a hide box on the cool half of the enclosure with lightly moistened substrate or sphagnum moss inside. It's also beneficial to occasionally mist the enclosure with a water sprayer, as this may stimulate your snake to come out and drink the resulting droplets. However, the enclosure should be kept mostly dry.

Substrate

Rosy boas are healthiest and happiest when they are housed on a substrate (a.k.a. "bedding") that imitates the conditions of their natural habitat and facilitates appropriate humidity levels. Sand or sandy soil is generally best for meeting a rosy boa's needs.

Zoo Med ReptiSand and Exo Terra Desert Sand are the best commercial substrates for a rosy boa's needs. Alternatively, you can use a DIY mix of 60% organic, additive-free topsoil + 40% play sand. Provide a substrate layer that is around 3-4" deep.

Feces and urates should be removed daily, and contaminated substrate should be scooped out and replaced. Substrate should be completely replaced once every 3-4 months.

Décor

Decorations play an important role in your rosy boa's enclosure as environmental enrichment. Enrichment items encourage exercise, stimulate your snake's natural instincts, and help promote overall wellbeing. And, of course, they make the enclosure look nice!

Décor ideas: additional hideouts/caves, cork logs, cork flats, cholla wood, sturdy branches, ledges, artificial plants, drought-tolerant live plants

Food

Rosy boas are carnivores, which means that they need a diet of whole animal prey in order to get the nutrition that their bodies need. Juveniles should be fed every 5-7 days, and adults should be fed every 10-14 days. At each feeding, provide a prey item(s) which totals around 10% of your snake's weight, assuming that it is not obese, and/or no larger than 1.5x the snake's width at its widest point.

Although mice are the most common feeders, the key to providing a healthy, balanced diet for your pet snake is VARIETY. Provide as varied of a diet as you possibly can, and you will be rewarded with a healthier, less picky snake.

Prey item ideas: mice, young rats, young hamsters, young gerbils, young quail, quail eggs, chicks, green anoles, Reptilinks

It's best to offer frozen-thawed prey rather than live to your pet snake. This is safer for the snake and generally considered to be more humane as well. Prey should be thawed in a plastic bag in warm water to around 100°F/38°C before offering. Use soft-tipped feeding tweezers to reduce the risk of getting accidentally bitten when the snake strikes.

Supplements

Rosy boas can survive without vitamin or mineral supplements, but using them occasionally is a good way to help prevent nutritional deficiencies. Every once in a while, lightly dust the prey item with a 50/50 mix of calcium and multivitamin before thawing.

Arcadia RevitaliseD3 and Repashy CalciumPlus LoD are both good supplements to use.

Water

Your rosy boa should have free access to a small bowl of fresh, clean water daily.