

Care Cards

Kingsnakes



The kingsnake and its subspecies belong to the genus *Lampropeltis* which means glossy skin. There are eight recognized subspecies: *californiae*-California kingsnake, *nigrita*-Mexican black kingsnake, *splendida*-Desert kingsnake, *nigra*-Black kingsnake, *holbrooki*-Speckled kingsnake, *getula*-Eastern or Chain kingsnake, *floridana*-Florida kingsnake, and *sticticeps*-Outer banks kingsnake. Kingsnakes can be divided into two groups: tri-colored and non-tri-colored kingsnakes. Additionally, they can be divided into two separate groups: the *getulus* group (*getulus* and *calligaster*) and the *triangulum* group (all other species). These two groups are separated by the presence (*triangulum*) or absence (*getulus*) of enlarged posterior maxillary teeth.

Kingsnakes can be found anywhere in the continental United States as well as northern Mexico. They are strong constrictors that possess a special immunity to snake venom. Kingsnakes come in a variety of color patterns and are one of the most popular snakes owned. They have good dispositions, hearty appetites, and will breed readily if the proper environmental conditions exist. In the wild, kingsnakes will consume frogs, eggs, small rodents, and other snakes. Because of their cannibalistic nature, kingsnakes should only be housed together during breeding cycles. Adult kingsnakes average three to five feet in length.

Because of their limited size, adult kingsnakes can be housed in an enclosure as small as a 30 gallon aquarium. However, I always prefer all captive animals be housed in as large a space as possible. The more aesthetically pleasing and environmentally accurate the enclosure, the happier and healthier the reptile will be. Kingsnakes are secretive by nature, and a hide box should always be provided within their enclosure.

A water reservoir large enough to allow for total body immersion should be provided within the enclosure. The water should be changed regularly to insure its quality. The most commonly used substrate items include: newspaper, butchers paper, and turf-type carpet. These items are all relatively inexpensive and should be cleaned or changed readily when soiled with urates or fecal matter to help maintain a healthy environment. Sand and corn cob beddings should be avoided to prevent intestinal obstruction following accidental ingestion. Additionally, these items will readily grow bacteria if soiled with urates or fecal material. Wood shavings should be avoided because they can lead to upper respiratory infections and mouth infections. Two wood pulp items now available are relatively safe for use with snakes. They are Care Fresh and Lizard Litter. Both products are strong desiccants and will cause dehydration in small snakes if adequate water is not available. Additionally, these products are costly as compared to other preferred substrate items.

Kingsnakes are terrestrial by nature and therefore a climbing branch is not necessary. The enclosure should be heated from the bottom of one side to create a temperature gradient for normal thermoregulation. Daytime temperatures should range from 74 degrees Fahrenheit at the cool end to 90 degrees Fahrenheit at the warm end. There should be a slight temperature drop at night. Although ultraviolet radiation



the snake and the mice. Kingsnakes will normally consume thawed mice, however freshly killed mice should be offered occasionally to insure proper vitamin levels. Although snakes can be fed live mice, care should be taken to insure the snakes safety with any live prey. If a proper strike and kill are not observed within five minutes after offering any live food item, the item should be removed and either offered again at a later date or killed and replaced within the snakes enclosure. With proper ambient temperature, normal intestinal transit time is around three days. Occasionally a wild caught kingsnake will not eat mice but rather will prefer lizards. This may lead to parasitic disease if the lizards are parasitized prior to being offered as food. One way to help switch a lizard eater to a mouse eater is to scent the mice with a lizard prior to feeding.



Juvenile kingsnakes will shed approximately every two weeks while adults will shed about four times a year. Kingsnakes mature between two and three years of age. Kingsnakes breed during early spring following hibernation. Females lay 4 to 20 eggs depending on the specific subspecies. The eggs should be incubated between 80 and 83 degrees Fahrenheit and will hatch in 60 to 70 days.



is not necessary with kingsnakes, I always suggest the use of a full spectrum, ultraviolet light for daytime lighting. The day light cycle should be between 9 to 14 hours depending on the specific time of the year. Adjusting the day light cycle to correlate with the current solar cycle will help stimulate normal behavior.

Adult kingsnakes should be fed once per week. They should be offered between one and three mice per feeding depending on the size of both

