

# Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society

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**Common Name:** Garter, Ribbon and Water Snakes

**Scientific Name:** *Thamnophis* spp.

**Native to:** North and Central America

**Size:** Up to three feet in length

**Life span:** This group of snakes can live for 10 years or more with proper care.

**General appearance:** All members of the genus *Thamnophis* are slender-bodied snakes and are usually striped with a solid or checkered body. Males generally have a thicker base of the tail than females.

## Housing requirements:

**Enclosure:** Most single snakes can be housed in a 10-gallon or 20-gallon tank with a secured screen top depending on the size of the snake. It is important that the enclosure is escape-proof as these snakes excel at escaping from their enclosures.

**Temperature:** Like most snakes, members of *Thamnophis* like a temperature gradient. The cool end on the enclosure should be around 70° F with a basking spot of around 84° F. At night the basking area should be turned off.

**Heat/Light:** It has not been proven whether these snakes require UV light or not, though they should be provided with an appropriate photoperiod. Basking areas can be achieved by using incandescent basking bulbs, infrared heat bulbs or ceramic emitters. Under no circumstance is a hot rock acceptable since these will often cause serious burns to your animal. Timers and thermostats can be used to control photoperiods and temperatures in the enclosure

**Substrate:** A variety of substrates can be utilized for these snakes. Newspaper or paper towels can be used, though many favor a more visually appealing substrate. Aspen shavings can be used as well as a sandy soil mixture of about 50% natural play sand and 50% potting soil. Cedar shavings should be avoided as they can prove to be toxic to your animal. New research has also proved that pine shavings may also have negative long term effects as well.

**Environment:** A suitably large enough pool should be provided for the snake to allow it to swim. A hide box should also be provided. Branches for climbing can also be provided,

**Diet:** These snakes eat a varied diet. Items such as earthworms, red worms, and other insects will usually be readily accepted. Fish such as guppies, sand eels and Lance fish can also be provided in the pool. An exclusive diet of just fish is not nutritionally complete and should be fed with other prey items such as earthworms. Many specimens can also be converted to appropriate sized mice.

**Maintenance:** Fresh water should be offered daily. If using newsprint then clean as needed. Wood shavings or a soil mix should be spot cleaned as needed. Periodically, the enclosure should be disinfected. A 5% bleach solution makes an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to rinse the enclosure thoroughly after disinfecting. As always, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling your snake or any cage accessories.

## Other references or recommended reading:

Kaplan, Melissa. "Garter Snakes." Updated 17 August 2002. Retrieved November 2008.  
<http://www.anapsid.org/gartcare.html>

Francis, Alan. "Maintenance of Garter Snakes." Updated May 2002. Retrieved November 2008.  
<http://www.gartersnake.co.uk/maintenance.htm>

"Garter & Ribbon Snake Care." Teen Reptile Club. Retrieved November 2008.  
<http://teenreptileclub.freewebspace.com/custom2.html>

This document is for guidance only and should not be used as the sole source of information. New information is being developed daily. It is recommend that a concerted effort be made to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the animals of interest