

Greater Cincinnati Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Gopher Snake
Pine Snake
Bull Snake

Scientific Name: *Pituophis catenifer*
Pituophis melanoleucus
Pituophis sayi

Native to: Gopher Snakes (*P. catenifer*) are from the western United States and can be found as far north as Canada and extend as far south as Baja, Mexico. Pine snakes (*P. melanoleucus*) are generally found throughout the southeastern portion of the United States and as far north as New Jersey. Bull Snakes (*P. sayi*) are found throughout the central United States and can be found as far north as Canada and as far south as Mexico.

Size: All members of the genus *Pituophis* are the some of the largest colubrids found in the United States and will often range in size from six to eight feet in length.

General appearance: All three species listed above are large bodied snakes with similar markings and slightly keeled dorsal scales. These snakes have a background color that ranges from reddish orange to tan to yellow with dark blotches on the back.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: A 20-gallon or larger aquarium with a secure top is needed at the very least for these snakes.

Temperature: A temperature gradient of 75° – 85° F should be setup for these snakes.

Heat/Light: Under the tank heaters, red heat bulbs, ceramic emitters, or basking bulbs can all be used to provide enough heat for these snakes. We do not recommend hot rocks since these often malfunction and can cause serious burn injuries to your pet. By using a timer and a basking bulb you can easily achieve warmer day time temperatures as well as a photoperiod for your pet. It has still not been proven that snakes require any source of UV light and will generally do well without it.

Substrate: Many of these species like to burrow so providing substrate such as potting soil, aspen shavings, cypress mulch or ground coconut fibers can provide excellent substrates which also allow for burrowing. You can also use newspaper or indoor/outdoor carpeting as well.

Environment: As mentioned above these snakes will often take advantage of substrates which allow them to burrow. They will also occasionally climb trees, so if cage space allows for branches you will often find your snakes taking advantage of the higher space. It is important to provide a hide box or enough rocks to allow the snake to feel secure and out of view.

Diet: Like most other snakes, members of *Pituophis* thrive on rodents. We recommend pre-killed frozen prey since it will help eliminate possible injury to the snake from the prey animal as well as kill most parasites. Meal sizes should be proportionate to the size of the snake. Hatchlings can be started on pinkies. All snakes can generally be fed once every seven to 10 days.

Maintenance: Fresh water should be offered daily. Spot clean as needed if using newsprint or wood shavings. The enclosure should also be disinfected periodically. 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. "Gopher Snakes" Updated 8/17/2003. Retrieved November 2008.
<http://www.anapsid.org/gopher.html>

"Pine/Bull/Gopher Snake" Long Island Herpetological Society. Retrieved November 2008.
<http://www.lihs.org/files/caresheets/sheet9.html>

"Pine, Bull and Gopher Snakes" New England Herpetological Society. Retrieved November 2008.
<http://www.neherp.com/bullsnake.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