

# Florida Kingsnake



## Florida Kingsnake

Kingdom:	<u>Animalia</u>
Phylum:	<u>Chordata</u>
Class:	<u>Reptilia</u>
Order:	<u>Squamata</u>
Suborder:	<u>Serpentes</u>
Family:	<u>Colubridae</u>
Genus:	<u>Lampropeltis</u>
Species:	<u>L. getula</u>
Subspecies:	<b>L. g. floridana</b>

Like other kingsnakes, this species is relatively easy to care for. They should be housed in a 20-40 gallon aquarium with aspen shavings for them to burrow in. Pine shavings are toxic to reptiles. The temperature should be around 84-90 degrees during the day and Nighttime temperatures should range between 68 and 75 degrees. Like other snakes, they should feed on pinkie or fuzzie mice as babies, then gradually increase in size until the snake reaches adulthood, which by then they should be eating large mice.[1]

# Terrarium Size

When it comes to choosing a terrarium for pet reptiles, keep in mind that larger is always better! Florida kingsnakes need plenty of room to stretch out and explore, and they are likely to quickly get bored in small or sparse enclosures, particularly if your snake is a male. The minimum enclosure size recommended for housing one Florida kingsnake is 48" L x 24" W x 24" H, but larger is recommended if you have the space for it!

Because kingsnakes are snake-eaters, multiple kingsnakes should not be housed in the same enclosure.

## Lighting

Florida kingsnakes are primarily diurnal (active during the day), so it's particularly beneficial to provide plenty of light during the daytime to help support their mental health. Although they are capable of surviving without UVB lighting, it's best practice to include it as part of the snake's setup so it can still reap the benefits. Our goal as good reptile keepers is not to simply allow our pets to survive — it is to do everything in our power to enable them to thrive. And there is mounting scientific evidence that UVB is, in fact, beneficial to kingsnakes and other species.

Therefore we recommend installing an Arcadia T5 HO Forest 6% or Zoo Med T5 HO Reptisun 5.0 in a reflective fixture, long enough to cover about 1/2 of the enclosure's length and placed next to the heat lamps. So for a 48" long enclosure, you will want a bulb about 22" long. Do not use other brands — when it comes to UVB, *brand matters!*

If your enclosure has a mesh top, it's best to install the UVB fixture on top of the enclosure. If it does not, it's best to also install a mesh lamp guard such as the Arcadia LampGuardPro over it so the snake can't come in direct contact with the bulb. The closest distance between a Florida kingsnake and its UVB lamp (basking distance) should be between 9-11", as UVB intensity varies with distance from the bulb.

## Heating

Because kingsnakes are reptiles, they need a range of temperatures within their enclosure so they can regulate their own body temperature as needed. Areas of heat speed up their metabolism and promote activities like digestion and healing. Cool areas slow the metabolism and promote activities like rest and energy conservation.

Your Florida kingsnake's basking area should be around 90°F, and the cool side should be between 75-84°F. Create a basking area by placing a platform or sturdy log below the lamps. Heating equipment should be turned off at night so temperatures can drop during this time.

Many kingsnake keepers will recommend using heat pads as the snake's primary source of heat, but heat pads don't work well in a bioactive enclosure. Instead, use a couple of heat bulbs like the 50w Arcadia Halogen Basking Spot in small dome heat lamps. Plug each heat lamp into a lamp dimmer or dimming thermostat so you can control them if they get too hot.

To monitor the temperatures in your snake's enclosure, place on digital probe thermometer in the basking area, and another on the floor of the cool end.

## Humidity

Florida kingsnakes prefer a moist, tropical habitat, so they need humid conditions within their enclosure to enjoy optimal health. Shoot for average humidity levels between 70-80%, ranging lower during the day and higher at night. You can maintain proper humidity by spraying the enclosure 2x/a day. If needed, run a reptile humidifier in the enclosure at night.

Your kingsnake should also have access to a humid hideout at all times. This hide should be placed on the cool half of the enclosure and lined with moistened sphagnum moss or substrate.

Don't forget to water your plants as needed! Fortunately, having a bioactive setup makes it easier to maintain humidity levels that are appropriate to a Florida kingsnake's needs.

## Substrate

To create a Florida kingsnake vivarium, you will need a bioactive-compatible substrate. That means things like aspen shavings or bark chips aren't going to work. You need a soil-like mix that mimics the conditions of your snake's natural habitat. You can make your own with a base of 60% plain topsoil and 40% coconut fiber mixed with sphagnum moss, leaf litter, and Bio Dude Bio Shot soil inoculant.

Alternatively, you can let The Bio Dude do the work for you with the Terra Fauna Bioactive Kit!

Finally, in order to make the substrate functional, make sure to add tropical CUC organisms like powder blue/orange isopods and springtails. You can also add other species like super worms, earthworms, and even a small millipede!

# Decorating the Enclosure

Enclosure décor is more than just making your setup look nice. It's also an important part of providing *environmental enrichment* to your kingsnake, which enhances your pet's quality of life by providing opportunities to express natural behaviors, explore, and exercise. In other words, décor is not optional — it's just as important as the other equipment mentioned in this care sheet for creating a functional reptile enclosure!

Here are some ideas for ways that you can decorate and enrich your kingsnake's bioactive enclosure:

- hollow logs
- bark flats
- hides/caves
- plants
- sheet moss
- décor

Florida kingsnakes like to hide in plant litter, so it's a good idea to give them a thick layer of leaf litter and/or hay on top of the substrate to burrow around in.

# Feeding Your Florida Kingsnake

Kingsnakes are obligate carnivores, which means that they *must* eat whole animals to get the nutrition they need. There is no replacement. Here is a rough sketch of how much and how often you should be feeding your snake, based on age:

- Hatchlings should be fed once every 5-7 days.
- Juveniles should be fed once every 7-10 days.
- Adults should be fed once every 10-14 days.

An appropriately-sized meal should be slightly larger than the snake at its widest point, or about 10% of its weight.

Always feed your snake inside its enclosure, not outside. Contrary to the myth, feeding inside does not make snakes more aggressive. However, use feeding tweezers to offer the prey, not your hand, to prevent accidental bites.

Variety is essential to complete nutrition. Aside from the usual mice and rats, you can add variety to your snake's diet with hamsters, gerbils, chicks, quail, anoles, house geckos, and Reptilinks. If you have the opportunity to offer your kingsnake an appropriately-sized, captive-bred snake as a feeder, do it! However, do not offer live prey if it can be avoided. Frozen feeders should be completely thawed to 75-100°F before offering.

## Handling Tips

After bringing your new pet home, do not handle it until it is eaten regularly. This can take anywhere from two weeks to two months, so be patient and use this time to make sure your husbandry is on point. Once your snake is ready for handling, handle it at least 1-2x weekly to keep it accustomed to you, but no more than once daily. Handling is also a good way to encourage your snake to exercise and provide additional enrichment!

## Wash Your Hands First

Before you pick up your snake, first wash your hands with soap or hand sanitizer. This removes potentially harmful bacteria, viruses, or parasites from your hands, as well as makes your hands smell distinctly inedible. Kingsnakes are very enthusiastic predators, so if your hand smells like food, it might get treated like food.

## How to Pick Up a Snake

Next, use a paper towel roll to tap its head (gently). This sets expectations by letting the snake know that it's time for handling, not food. Pick it up with two hands, one behind the head and one supporting the rest of the body. NEVER pick up a snake by its tail — this can really hurt their spine!

## Safety with Snakes

Always supervise children closely when they are handling a pet snake (or any kind of pet, frankly). This is as much for the snake's safety as it is for the child's. Keep the snake's head away from your face, and always wash your hands and arms with soap or hand sanitizer after handling.

## DO NOT Handle If...

Don't handle your snake within 48 hours of a meal, as this can stress them out and lead to regurgitation, which is a traumatic experience that can actually lead to death. Also do not handle if your pet's eyes have turned opaque or cloudy. This means that the snake is preparing to shed and can't see well, making them more jumpy than usual and more likely to bite out of self-defense.

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