

WESTERN HOGNOSE SNAKE CARE GUIDE

Heterodon nasicus

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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Western hognose snakes are small, manageable, and genuinely personable — one of the best choices for a first-time snake owner. When threatened, they may hiss dramatically, flatten their neck like a cobra, or play dead with impressive commitment. None of this is dangerous. It is a performance. Enjoy it.

🔍 NATURAL HISTORY

Stat	Detail
Scientific name	<i>Heterodon nasicus</i>
Adult size	14–24 inches — females are generally larger than males
Lifespan	12–18+ years in captivity
Temperament	Usually docile and curious — may bluff-strike, hiss, flatten the neck, or play dead. All harmless.
Signature feature	Upturned, keeled snout — used for digging. Non-negotiably charming.

🔍 HOUSING

Life Stage	Minimum Enclosure Size
Juvenile	10–20 gallon tank
Adult	20–40 gallon tank — minimum floor space 24" × 12"

- Escape-proof enclosure with a **tight-fitting lid** is non-negotiable — hognose snakes are motivated escape artists
- Substrate: aspen shavings, paper bedding, or a reptile-appropriate sand-topsoil mix — **burrowing** is a favorite activity and the substrate should support it
- Avoid cedar or pine substrate — toxic
- Provide at least two hides — one on the warm side, one on the cool side — plus adequate depth for burrowing
- Add branches, rocks, and artificial plants for enrichment

🔍 TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY

Zone	Temperature
Warm side	88–92°F
Cool side	75–80°F

Nighttime	70–75°F
Humidity	30–50% — low to moderate

- Use an under-tank heater or heat tape with a thermostat — always thermostat-regulated to prevent thermal burns
- Never use hot rocks — serious burn risk
- Provide a small, shallow water dish at all times

☀ LIGHTING

- UVB is not required for western hognose snakes — but a low-output UVB bulb (2–5%) can encourage natural behaviors and may support overall health
- Provide a consistent light cycle of **10–12 hours** of light daily to mimic natural day/night rhythm
- Use a timer for consistency — irregular light cycles can cause behavioral stress over time

🍴 DIET & FEEDING

- Feed **pre-killed (frozen/thawed)** mice only — live prey is not necessary and can injure the snake
- Prey size: approximately the same width as the snake’s widest point
- Warm prey to body temperature before offering — a cold mouse will often be refused

Life Stage	Feeding Frequency
Juvenile	Every 4–5 days
Adult	Every 7–10 days

- Do not handle within 48 hours after feeding — this disrupts digestion and can cause regurgitation

🖐 HANDLING

- Begin handling once your snake is eating regularly and has settled into its enclosure
- Support the entire body during handling — never dangle or restrain by the head
- Bluff strikes, hissing, and neck-flattening are normal defensive displays — they are harmless and typically decrease with consistent, calm handling over time
- Playing dead is another normal behavior — if your hognose goes limp and flips upside-down, it is not injured. It is acting. Put it down and check back in a few minutes.
- Avoid handling during shed cycles or within 48 hours of feeding

🏥 COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS & VETERINARY CARE

- Initial wellness exam after purchase — establish a baseline before any problems develop
- Annual exams to monitor health, weight, and overall condition

- Prompt evaluation for any appetite changes or respiratory symptoms — do not wait to see if issues resolve on their own

Call us if you notice persistent refusal to eat, respiratory noise or wheezing, bubbles from the nose, difficulty shedding or retained eye caps, unexplained weight loss, or lethargy. Western hognose snakes are hardy but problems caught early are far easier to treat.

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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