



Boa Constrictors

Boa constrictor & *Boa imperator*

INTERMEDIATE · 5–8 FT ADULT · HEAVY-BODIED · NOCTURNAL · CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

If the ball python is the classic first snake, the boa is the classic second: bigger, calmer, and more deliberate, with a heavy-bodied presence no colubrid can match. Most are docile to the point of laziness. The honest headline isn't temperament. It's space. An adult boa needs furniture-sized housing, and the decision to buy one is really a decision about the room it will live in.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	5–8 ft (females larger)
Ambient temp	78–85 °F
Basking spot	88–92 °F
Night temp	72–78 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	Beneficial
Feeding	Rodents every 7–14 days
Representative	<i>Boa constrictor occidentalis</i>



Captive-bred boas fill NARBC tables in every locality and morph. Ask which lineage you are buying, because adult size follows it.

Photo: Rob Foster / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Temperament & Handling

Boas earn their reputation: calm, slow, and tolerant of handling once settled in. What surprises new keepers is the strength. Even a mid-sized boa is solid muscle, and an adult deserves a relaxed, confident grip supporting most of the body. The real risk isn't aggression, it's the feeding response: a hungry boa strikes at motion near an opening door. Tap gently or use a hook so the snake knows it isn't dinnertime, and let a fed boa digest undisturbed for a couple of days.

02

Housing by Life Stage

This is where the commitment lives. A newborn starts comfortably in a 24×18×12, but plan around the endpoint: 72×24×24 minimum for an adult, 96×36×24 preferred (furniture-sized and non-negotiable for a heavy 6-foot-plus female). Boas are ground-oriented, so prioritize floor space over height, then add a stout branch anyway; they use it. Racks are a conditional compromise for young animals and a hard no for adults. Price the adult enclosure before you buy the snake. They're solitary, so plan on one boa per enclosure.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Newborn	24×18×12	36×18×18	Live-born, not hatched. Start in a solid enclosure.
Juvenile	36×18×18	48×24×18	Rapid growth with proper feeding; it won't stay this size long.
Subadult	48×24×18	60×24×24	Sexual dimorphism is clear by now: females pull ahead in size.
Adult	72×24×24	96×36×24	Females 6–9 ft, males 5–7, heavy-bodied; climbing structure must be solid.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance (benchmark: *Boa constrictor occidentalis*; the common pet boa, *B. imperator*, keeps to the same numbers).

03

Heat & Light

Run a gradient: 78–85 °F ambient with an 88–92 °F basking surface, and let nights ease to 72–78 °F (boas take a mild drop in stride). Heat from above with a thermostat-controlled halogen or deep heat projector; a snake this strong wraps whatever it can reach, so guard every fixture and skip heat rocks entirely. UVB isn't mandatory here, but it's beneficial. A low-output fixture over the basking zone is a worthwhile upgrade. Trust a probe thermometer and an IR gun, never the dial.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold 50–70%: moderate, not swampy. Constantly wet substrate with no airflow breeds scale rot, so pair moisture with real ventilation. A deep bedding layer with a moistened lower level buffers humidity better than daily misting ever will. The water bowl does half the work: make it large and heavy enough for a full-body soak, and expect the snake to camp in it the week before a shed. Sheds are your gauge. One clean piece means the humidity is right; flaky scraps mean raise it.

05

Substrate & Furnishings

Cypress mulch or coarse coco chip are the workhorses: they hold humidity without souring and take a deep layer well. Skip aromatic woods like cedar and pine outright. Furnish for a heavy animal: two snug hides (warm and cool), a branch or shelf anchored so it can't shift under real weight, and enough cover that the snake can cross the enclosure unseen. Boas are ambush hunters, not decorators; a bare cage makes a stressed snake, and a stressed boa stops eating.

06

Feeding

Rodents, frozen/thawed, sized to the snake's widest point. Mice for young animals, rats as they grow. Cadence is every 7–14 days, young boas toward the faster end, adults toward the slower. The rule this species lives or dies by: **an adult boa is far easier to overfeed than to underfeed**. Boas run a slow metabolism, they'll eat whenever offered, and obesity quietly shortens more captive boa lives than underfeeding ever has. Feed on schedule, weigh monthly, and let body condition, not enthusiasm, set the menu.

07

Health Red Flags

Check the belly every handling: pinkish, discolored, or blistered scales mean scale rot from a too-damp floor. Wheezing, bubbling nostrils, or open-mouth breathing is respiratory infection: a vet visit, not wait-and-see. Tiny black specks on the snake or in the water bowl are mites; treat animal and enclosure both. Repeated regurgitation, months of refusal with falling weight, or star-gazing, corkscrewing posture means a reptile vet the same week. The last one, same day.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.