



Mexican Black Kingsnakes

Lampropeltis nigrata

BEGINNER · 3–4 FT ADULT · 15–20 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · MEXICO & ARIZONA

A kingsnake in a tuxedo. Mexican blacks are the jet-black subspecies of the common kingsnake, and the color is there at hatching, not something they grow into. They come from the deserts and scrub of Mexico and Arizona, they hunt by day, and they're as hardy as snakes get. The honest headline: kingsnakes eat other snakes, so this one lives alone. Always.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	3–4 feet
Ambient temps	75–85 °F day, 70–75 °F night
Basking surface	85–88 °F
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Humidity	40–60%
Diet	Carnivore, mice
Feeding cadence	Every 7–10 days
Lifespan	15–20 years



Captive-bred Mexican black kingsnakes fill breeder tables at NARBC shows. The solid black is the subspecies itself, not a designer morph.
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01

Temperament & Handling

Mexican blacks are bold. They investigate rather than hide, and they tolerate handling as well as any colubrid. That confidence has a flip side: a hungry king strikes first and identifies later, so use a hook or a gentle nudge to shift the snake out of food mode before you reach in. Hatchlings can be nippy and musky. They grow out of it. Adults are among the easiest snakes in the hobby to work with.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space beats height at every stage. A hatchling starts at 16×8×8 and does better in a 20×12×12. A juvenile takes 20×12×12 up to 24×18×12, subadults want 36×18×12 and ideally 48×18×18, and an adult settles into a 48×24×18 for life. Racks suit the small stages. **House kingsnakes one to an enclosure: they eat other snakes, including each other.** Two hides, warm side and cool, and a lid that latches. Kings are famous escape artists.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	16×8×8	20×12×12	Black from hatching, no color change to come. Rack systems work fine here.
Juvenile	20×12×12	24×18×12	Strong feeders that thrive on rodents; racks or tubs still suit this stage.
Subadult	36×18×12	48×18×18	Sized like a California king by now; racks only if the snake still fits.
Adult	48×24×18	48×24×18	Grown at 3–4 feet. Floor space over height; strictly one snake per enclosure.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Horizontal floor space is the priority at every stage; height is optional.

03

Heat & Light

Run a thermal gradient down the length of the enclosure: 75–85 °F ambient with a warm surface of 85–88 °F at one end, and let nights drop to 70–75 °F. Overhead heat on a thermostat is the clean solution; check surface temps with an infrared gun, not the dial. Never use a heat rock. Kingsnakes are day-active, so a low-output UVB tube is a genuine benefit even though they'll live without one. Give them a real day and night cycle.

04

Humidity & Water

Aim for 40–60% humidity and don't chase it. This is a desert and scrub animal; a big stable water bowl on the cool side, changed a couple of times a week and sooner if it's fouled, holds the whole range in most homes. The bowl matters twice over, because kings soak in it before a shed. Add a humid hide packed with damp sphagnum when the eyes go blue, and stuck shed stops being a problem. A wet, unventilated tub is the real risk here, not dry air.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

Aspen bedding is the hobby standard for kings, deep enough to burrow in, and they will burrow. Cypress mulch works if your room runs dry. Skip loose sand with young snakes; the desert address is misleading and impaction isn't worth the aesthetic. Give them cover they have to work for: cork rounds, a branch or two, leaf litter or crumpled paper across the floor. A kingsnake with nothing to push through will spend its day testing the lid instead.

06

Feeding

Rodents, start to finish. A hatchling takes a pinky and an adult takes a proportionate mouse, on a cadence of every 7–10 days. Frozen/thawed is the standard: safer than live, and kings take it without fuss. Feed in the enclosure rather than a separate tub, and use a hook to tell the snake that an open door isn't dinner. Prey should be about the width of the snake at its thickest. The strike is appetite, not aggression.

07

Health Red Flags

Kings are hardy, which means trouble shows up late. Stuck shed is the common one: a ring left on the tail tip or caps over the eyes points at humidity and hydration, and a retained tail ring can cost the tip. Black specks in the water bowl are the signature of snake mites. Weigh the snake monthly, because a scale sees decline before you do. Wheezing, open-mouth breathing or bubbling at the nostrils is a reptile-vet visit, not a wait-and-see.

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.