



Rough Green Snakes

Opheodrys aestivus

INTERMEDIATE · 22–32 IN ADULT · 5–8 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · ARBOREAL · EASTERN US

A snake you keep for the pleasure of watching, not holding. Rough green snakes are slender, day-active insect hunters from the woodland edges and wetlands of the eastern United States, and they live their whole lives off the ground, draped through branches like a vine. The honest headline: they are specialists. They eat live insects, they need a planted vertical space, and most animals offered for sale were taken from the wild.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	22–32 in
Ambient temp	75–82 °F
Basking spot	85–88 °F
Night drop	68–72 °F
Humidity	50–70%
UVB	5.0, 10–12 in over screen
Diet	Insects only, every 2–3 days
Lifespan	5–8 years



Kept for looking at, not handling. At NARBC tables, ask for captive-bred rough greens: most on the market still are not.

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01

A Snake You Watch, Not Handle

Rough greens are not aggressive; they're fragile. A stressed animal doesn't bite, it stops eating, and a snake this slender has no reserves to spend. Handle only when you must move it, briefly, with both hands supporting the body. Sourcing is the harder problem. Most rough greens for sale were caught wild, usually arrive carrying parasites, and many never settle. **Buy captive-bred, and walk away from any seller who can't tell you where the animal came from.**

02

Housing: Build Up, Not Out

Everything about this snake points vertical. It hunts along branches and sleeps in foliage, so height and climbing routes beat floor space at every stage. Front-opening glass or PVC with good ventilation works; racks never do, at any age. You will read that rough greens can be housed in groups. The cost is real: with loose crickets you can't tell who ate, weight loss hides for weeks on an animal this slender, and one wild-caught snake's parasites become everyone's. Keep one per enclosure.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	12×12×18	18×18×24	Very delicate, and almost always wild-caught. Hold out for captive-bred.
Juvenile	18×18×24	18×18×24	Takes soft-bodied prey. Racks are wrong for this species at every stage.
Subadult	18×18×24	24×18×36	Heavy plant cover is critical; a bare cage makes a stressed snake.
Adult	24×18×36	36×18×36	Bioactive strongly recommended. A display animal, not a handling snake.

Enclosure sizes in inches (W×D×H), from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Vertical space matters more than floor space at every stage.

03

Heat & Light

Give the cage a real gradient, top to bottom: 75–82 °F ambient, a basking spot up in the branches reading 85–88 °F, and a night drop to 68–72 °F. Warmth belongs up high where the snake actually sits, so mount heat and light above the perches, not under the floor. Never a heat rock. This species is out in daylight, and 5.0 UVB is recommended: rest the tube on top of the screen and set the highest perch 10–12 in below it. Screen cuts a quarter to half the output, and glass blocks UVB outright.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold humidity at 50–70% and let it cycle. A heavy misting in the morning, drying back through the day. Standing damp with poor airflow is how respiratory trouble starts, so ventilate. Keep a shallow water dish, but know that many rough greens never use it. They drink the way they do in the wild, off wet leaves, which is the practical argument for misting rather than trusting a bowl. Live plants and a moisture-holding substrate carry the middle of the range for you.

05

Plants, Perches, and Substrate

Bioactive is strongly recommended here, and heavy plant cover is not decoration. It's the difference between a snake that hunts in the open and one that hides all day. Fill the upper half with thin branches, vine, cork and broad-leaved plants the snake can lie along and disappear into. Underneath, a moist bioactive mix with leaf litter holds humidity and feeds a cleanup crew. Screen the top, because crickets escape and a planted cage gives feeders somewhere to hide too.

06

Feeding

This is the part that decides whether you should keep one: rough greens eat insects and nothing else. Crickets, caterpillars and grasshoppers, offered every 2–3 days, for the animal's whole life. No rodents, ever, at any size. That means a standing feeder supply, gut-loading, and dusting: plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus, at most feedings, plus a multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly for adults. They hunt by sight, so drop feeders up in the branches, not in a bowl on the floor.

07

Health Red Flags

Weight is the whole story in a snake this thin. Get a digital scale and use it weekly: a steady decline is the first honest sign of trouble, and in a wild-caught animal it usually means parasites. Watch for insects refused over several feedings, runny or bloody stool, regurgitation, mites around the eyes and chin, wrinkled skin and stuck shed, and open-mouth breathing. Any of those means a reptile vet, and bring a fresh fecal sample.

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.