

does require any lighting. Lights do however improve appearances and make seeing the snake easier. Caution—Do not to use high wattage globes as they generate heat. You do not want to over heat the snake.

Heating is required, especially in winter. Again research the species to be kept. Tropical species require heat in winter, otherwise they will get pneumonia or related illnesses. Heating should be placed on the opposite side to the water bowl. These pads are commercially available. Get a size to suit your cage. Generally you heat around a quarter to half of the cage

What about hides?

You can either buy a nice rock or timber hide. If you use timber make sure it is painted with enamel or marine varnish. Hides need to be the size where a snake can just get into it, then they feel secure. As they are secretive animals they will often spend time in it. It has been recommended to have a hide on both sides of the cage so the snake can thermo-regulate. An alternative to this is to provide a long hide going from the cold to the hot side of the cage, allowing the snake to remain in a secure area & regulate it's temperature.

Another alternative, of which my own cobra's are very fond is a short piece of 100 dia uPVC tubing with a end cap on it. They do not look great, but the snakes enjoy them.

How large must the water bowl be?

Again it is species dependant. It should be flat bottomed and the base bigger than the bowls height so it is difficult for the snake to tip it over. A lot of species like to soak in their water bowls, so you should give a bowl big enough for the snake to fit in and still have adequate water. For some species water bowls are pointless as they do not drink from bowls. You then need to spray the cage daily so they can drink off their bodies. If the species is from areas of high humidity you can place a very flat dish on the heating pad and fill it as required.

Many snakes will defecate in the water which makes regular water changing essential. This is more prevalent in species that like to lie in their bowls.

What about husbandry?

We have prepared a 'Basic Guide to Snake Husbandry' brochure as well.

Who do I contact if there is a 'Problem Snake'?

Firstly **Don't kill it!!** Make sure someone watches the snake and call us to come and remove it.

What else does our company do?

We are not restricted to 'problem snake' removal, and we provide the following services:-

- **Educational Talks**
- **Shows** and promotional displays
- **Courses**
 - Snake Handling
 - Snake Identification
- **Tortoise Husbandry**
- Sale of **Reptile Accessories**:-
 - Snake Handling & Sexing Equipment
 - Snake Cages
 - Reptile food, mice, rats & rabbits
 - Husbandry Books—IBCS Series



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Education of Today's Generations
To preserve Tomorrows reptiles

A GUIDELINE TO ENCLOSURE DESIGNS



Our Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*) enclosure. Hide is on the right over the heating pad, some cage decorations to assist in shedding and the water bowl on the left. The cage is 1.3m long x 0.45m deep x 0.45m high , front access with lock and painted with white enamel while all joints were sealed with acrylic silicone prior to painting.

Although care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this brochure, the writer takes no responsibility as to the accuracy of the information contained herein and it shall at all times remain the responsibility of the reader to verify such information.

It must be mentioned that this is a guide to enclosure designs and cage furniture. We have mentioned a wide range of alternatives, and it is up to you as the keeper to decide which method works **best for you**. There are Pro's and Con's to every alternative, but as long as your snake is kept in a healthy condition, any alternative is correct. Reptile husbandry is subjective and most believe their way is the only way.

What Size of Enclosure will be required?

Cage size is mainly dependant on what the owner wants to provide for the snake. There are some basic guidelines to follow for the snakes habits and environmental requirements, which are as follows:-

Length: 80% of snake length
Width: 40% of snake length
Height: 40% of snake length

As an example, an adult Rinkhals of approximately 1.5m in length, the recommended cage size would be 1.2m x 0.6m x 0.6m. However as the snake is not arboreal (tree living) you could lower the cage to around 0.35-0.4m.

For an arboreal snake of similar size it is recommended that the height be increased to approximately 60% and cage length reduced to approximately 65-70%

The above sizes are **minimum** guidelines in order to keep the snake healthy and allow it to move about freely. The main aspect is to allow the snake to have a temperature difference within the cage and be able to stretch out it's full or most of it's body length.

The cage should be sized to allow you to put in a water bowl of an adequate size, hide box and some decorations, but still leave some open space for the snake to move.

What materials are recommended for the Enclosure?

The main thing with the materials used for cage construction is for them to be non-absorbent. Snakes do now and then tip their water bowls over. The cage should not be able to absorb any of the defecation as it increases the chances of bacteria and unhealthy living conditions.

One must consider cage cleaning. It is easier to clean non-absorbent materials like melamine or similar. A non-absorbent material can be disinfected and cleaned easily

and will not stain.

Care must be taken if using melamine covered chip board to have all the edges sealed, as chip board can easily warp. This can make the cage unsightly as well as giving the snake a chance to escape through a weak point or opening.

What enclosure design is recommended?

The design and the final appearance is very much up to the keepers personal preference. Most people prefer to use front sliding glazing for the following reasons:-

- Easier to stack cages on top of one another, which in turn allows more snakes to be kept in the same area compared with top access.
- It is easier to carry out cleaning & decorating from the front than from the top.
- Also when going to take your snake out, it is far less of a threat to the snake when approaching from the front.

The cage must have **adequate ventilation**. This can be in the form of plastic formed grid or holes (smaller than the snake) drilled in the side of the cage. Wire mesh is not recommended as some snakes rub their noses raw in an attempt to escape. One solution is to secure the mesh to the outside of the cage and secure a stocking to the inside, forming a soft buffer.

The openings for ventilation must be small, especially for hatchlings. Snakes are accomplished escape artists. Rather have more small holes if the cage is likely to house hatchlings.

It is a good idea to have the cage locked. This prevents unwanted access. It will also stop the snake possibly moving the glazing and escaping through the access. It is highly recommended and a legal requirement in some provinces with venomous snakes!

Cages can be purchased from various pet shops as well as some specialist suppliers. These are specially designed to keep snakes and are secure.

To sum up a common design is to have a cage of the size you want, with venting on the sides, sliding glazing to the front and a soft board backing. Care must be taken to seal the timber with melamine, enamel paint or marine varnish and all joints with silicon.

The enclosure **must** be free from any chemical fumes before putting the snake inside. They can cause problems with the respiratory system and possibly kill the snake.

What lighting should be used?

This is also up to the person. If incandescent lighting is to be used as an alternative / additional heat source it is recommended that the snake should not be able to touch the bulb. In order to avoid the snake from being burnt on the light, a cage should surround the bulb.

Fluorescent lighting can also be used. It has the advantage that it doesn't give off heat. During summer this is of importance as the cages generally are in the upper heat range for the reptiles, and no additional heat is required. They also do not need to be screened off from the snake, making the installation easier.

What substrate do I need to use?

Many collectors have their own preferences, and it means trying various alternatives until you find one that suits your needs.

Gravel or River Sand can be used. It is fairly easy to clean on a daily basis, but a little more demanding to clean and dry. The humidity generally remains in an acceptable range and any moisture dropped on the gravel soaks to the bottom.

Carpet is another commonly used alternative. It has been said to reduce the humidity, but many keepers have no hassles with it and their snakes shed without complications. It is also very easy and quick to clean.

Fibre-grass is an alternative to carpet. It is 100% synthetic and does not absorb any moisture. Likewise it is very easy to clean and maintain. There are also many collectors using this with no problems. It is only available in bright green.

Newspaper is a hygienic and easy to clean alternative. It does not look very pleasant as snakes normally move underneath it. If you are going to use this strategically place cage furniture to reduce the chance of the snake going under the paper. Many institutions like the former Transvaal Snake Park make use of newspaper, mainly for time saving & hygiene.

What about Lighting & Heating?

Lighting is species dependant. Nocturnal species do not require any specialised lighting, some diurnal species may require it. Research the species to be kept and find out if it