

ASPIDITES

(Woma & Black-headed Pythons)



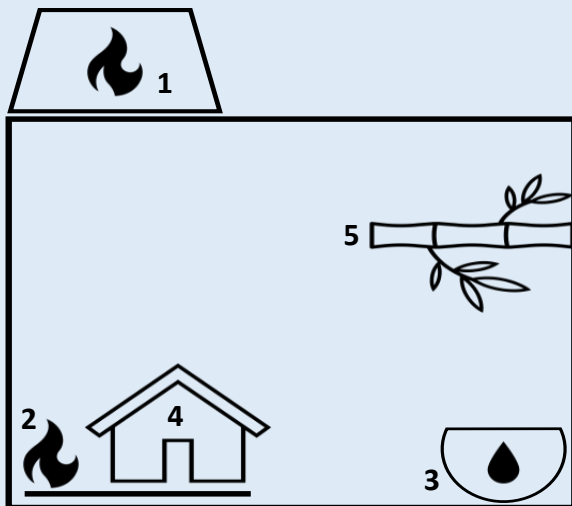
Aspidites are a fun and quirky snake! They are perfect for a first time keeper or make a wonderful addition to an established collection with their mischievous personalities. These highly predictable, well-natured snakes make a great alternative to conventional pets like dogs and cats and are many keepers favourite species.

Housing

Enclosure Size: Enclosure size should grow with your snake; this ensures that a solid thermal gradient (cool end, warm end) can be maintained that matches the current needs of your pet. Snakes in the Aspidites genus live a mainly terrestrial life, however they will often climb if given a suitable enclosure. For a hatchling, an enclosure size of approx. 45cmLx45cmDx30cmH is recommended.

Enclosure materials should also be considered as they offer different traits.

- Glass: waterproof but offers no insulation against heat loss.
- MDF: keeps heat well but is not watertight.
- Custom enclosures: can be tailored to your needs but can be expensive.



Example Hatchling Enclosure Setup:

1. Top heat
2. Bottom heat
3. Water bowl
4. Hide
5. Climbing log

Temperature: Snakes in this genus are native to warmer regions, so the temperature in their enclosure will replicate this. Enclosures should have both a "cool end" and a "warm end" that allows your snake to choose the temperature it would like to be. These snakes enjoy a basking spot of 35-38°C and a "cool end" of 25-27°C. The wattage of your lights/heating will depend on the size of your enclosure and should be controlled with a thermometer/thermostat to ensure the correct temperatures are being maintained.

Heating: Lighting/Heating: There are a few different ways to light and heat your enclosure, but we have found the most successful way for hatchlings is:

- Bottom heat via a heat mat or heat cords that is set continuously for both day and night heat.
- Top heat set with a timer (10-12 hours)

The importance of ensuring that heat sources are safe and controlled cannot be expressed enough! Your snake should never have direct access to a heat source; lamps should be in cages or sitting above enclosures on mesh, cords should be covered and **MUST** be set with a thermostat. Your snake will not move off a heat source even if it is too hot; they will sit and cook.

Substrate: There are several great substrates that can be used for snakes!

- Paper towel: easy to clean & replace.
- Fake grass: easy to clean but can smell after time if not cleaned properly.
- Kitty Litter Pellets: traps moisture/odour but may be ingested.
- Reptile safe sand: easy to clean but may be ingested.
- Aspen bedding: easy to clean but not all brands are snake safe.

Accessories: Keeping your snake's enclosure simple to begin with is recommended while you get used to each other. A simple beginner enclosure will include:

- Water bowl
- A hide they can squeeze into
- A plant or stick to escape their heat if needed.

Handling

Snakes within the *Aspidites* genus are quite predictable and easy to handle, however each snake will have a varying personality. Handling can be slowly introduced daily to avoid overwhelming them, with handling sessions kept gentle and calm, allowing you snake to move freely in your hands. Sensitive areas such as the head & tail are best avoided during handling. Pets such as dogs and cats should be out of the room while you are handling your reptile, and supervision is always recommended for young children.

You snake can be removed from its enclosure using a few different methods:

- Hands: can sometimes be scary for your snake.
- Hook: minimal stress to the animal.
- Allowing your snake to exit the enclosure themselves.

Feeding

Mice: The appropriate size mouse will leave a slight bulge in your snake's stomach. They should not struggle excessively to eat if being fed the correct mice. Mice can be defrosted in a container overnight or left on a counter to warm to room temperature before feeding.

Feeding: Feeding can be done within their enclosure, or in a separate feeding environment to discourage food response/ingestion of substrate. Tongs are recommended to reduce the risk of accidental bites. Food can be introduced slowly in front of your snake's nose - an interested snake should be seen tongue flicking & following the food with their heads before striking.

Feeding a hatchling once a week is the recommendation, however, allow time for digestion, a general guide would be:

- Pinkie mice: Feed every 7 days.
- Velvet mice: Feed every 10 days.
- Weaner mice: Feed every 14 days.
- Adult Mice: Feed every 14 days.

See below troubleshooting for information on where to purchase & how to defrost mice

Troubleshooting

My python isn't eating!

Your new snake may need a few days to settle into its environment – this can be quite a stressful time for them (and you).

1. Stop handling sessions to minimise stress.
2. Check your husbandry is correct and your snake has access to their heat.
3. Use slow, calm movement when introducing food to your snake.
4. Your python may be going into a brumation cycle in the cooler months.

My snake didn't slough (shed) properly!

A juvenile snake should be shedding approx. 8 times a year (every 1.5-2 months) if eating well. A healthy adult snake may only shed a few times a year. Ensure that your husbandry is correct, as this can all affect your snake's ability to shed correctly. Keeping up humidity while your snake is in its slough cycle will encourage a healthy shed. This can be done a few ways:

- Lightly misting substrate on the warm end of the enclosure
- Misting your snake daily while they are in a slough cycle.
- Running your snake through a damp paper towel or cloth for stubborn shed.

If all other attempts have not worked, seek professional advice *see references. Do not attempt to remove skin yourself as this can cause damage to your snake's new layer of keratin and lead to further issues.

It's winter and my snake is acting different!

Your new snake may go into a state known as "brumation" during the cooler months. This is an instinctual behaviour that snakes have adapted to survive when temperatures are too cool to actively hunt & digest food. As a hatchling, we recommend using heat 24 hours a day to help stop brumation behaviour if you wish for them to continue eating.

If your adult snake does start refusing their food, keep offering mice for their next 2-3 feeds. If they still refuse, feeding can stop until the warmer months, and their

enclosure temperatures can be lowered while they're in this state.

Bites!

Your new snake may try to bite you during handling sessions; know that this is not likely to hurt or cause any injury and is expected to happen at least once or twice during the life of your pet. There are a few possible reasons why a snake may bite:

1. Defence: keep handling movements very slow and patient while they condition.
2. Stress: A snake hook can help minimise stress while removing your snake from its enclosure
3. Food response: your snake may be associating their enclosure with being fed.

My snake keeps striking at the glass!

This is usually a defensive behaviour, and it is recommended that you cover the warm half of your snake's enclosure with a dark object (black card paper for example). This will limit visual stimulation while your snake settles into its new home. You can slowly start removing the object over time as your snake becomes more de-sensitised.

I've lost my new snake!

Before your snakes come home, check that all gaps in the enclosure are thoroughly sealed. A great way to do this is with a torch – shine it into your enclosure while dark, can you see light coming through any big gaps? Always check your enclosure is closed correctly, and never leave your snake outside of its enclosure unsupervised. If you do lose your new snake, there are steps you can take to locate them as fast as possible.

- They don't usually move far, so check under/near their enclosure.
- If possible, restrict snake to the room it was lost in (i.e., if lost in the lounge room, close all windows, seal doors by wedging a towel underneath, close vents etc.)
- Snakes are thigmotactic, so look in any dark, tight spaces your snake could coil up in.
- Look in places that emit heat like under fridges, on top of dishwashers, behind TVs, windowsills.
- If the snake cannot be located, contact the DCBA (Department of Biodiversity & Attractions) as soon as possible and follow their instructions.

Where do I purchase mice?

Mice can be bought from your local pet store in the freezer section, with a variety of sizes available. It is advised that mice be placed into a freezer as soon as possible after purchase so they do not thaw and re-freeze. Try to avoid re-freezing already thawed mice. It is best to source your mice from a reputable supplier so you can ensure they are disease/parasite free and have been fed an appropriate diet.

How do I defrost mice?

There are multiple ways of defrosting mice safely:

- Transfer from frozen into an airtight container and defrosted in the fridge overnight before warming to room temperature on a countertop.
- Transfer from frozen into an airtight container and warmed on a countertop until fully thawed.
- Transfer from frozen into an airtight container and thawed in a bath of warm (not boiling) water until thawed.
- Avoid feeding half frozen mice as this can lead to digestive issues.
- Never microwave mice or any other reptile grade food.
- Always wash hands after handling mice, and wash containers thoroughly.

Book a One-on-One Session

With over 40 years combined experience in the herpetology industry, the Discover Deadly team share a range on expertise. Consultant sessions are available for general advice or more specific issues. Bookings can be made online for \$30 up to 15 minutes.

Resources

Your first point of contact for advice/enquiries should always be your original breeder, however, there are several professional businesses that can be reached out to.

- Unusual Pet Vets (Murdoch) 08 6117 7440
- Unusual Pet Vets (Osbourne Park) 08 6117 7450
- Busselton Vet Hospital 08 9752 1433
- Discover Deadly 08 9755 1771
- Southwest Pets (Bunbury) 08 9721 6217
- DBCA 08 9442 0300

Further Reading:

- "Keeping Children's Pythons" by Greg Fyfe & Darren Green
- "Keeping & Breeding Australian Pythons" by Mike Swan
- "How Snakes Work" by Lilly White
- "A Guide to Australian Pythons in Captivity" by Adam Elliot

This care sheet© has been produced as a general guide for Western Australian reptile keepers. It should not replace the advice of a veterinarian.

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