

Snake Snacks

An Overview of Feeding snakes

Snakes can make incredible pets. Most are beautiful, gentle, and very handleable at all ages when raised in captivity. When considering a snake as a pet there is primarily one factor that causes buyers to be hesitant about keeping one as a pet - feeding. With our help we can educate you on how and why it is necessary to feed your slithery friend their rodent snacks.



Please, have no fear, that's why we're here. Below will be a complete guide to feeding your snake ensuring it stays happy and healthy!

Why mice and rats? In their natural environment snakes eat rodents as a complete nutritional diet. These two small mammals are the most readily available in the pet trade as a source of nutrition.

Live or frozen? Here at Wilmette Pet Center we only sell frozen mice/rats. There is a large ethical and moral debate regarding this topic. We push past that. As we sell both mice and rats as pets, we feel it would be unacceptable to sell them as food. Past the moral obligation, there are safety concerns an owner must be aware of. Feeding live has a higher chance of transmitting bacterial diseases. Feeding live opens the possibility of the mammal injuring the reptile during feeding. Feeding frozen then dehydrated is overall safer and easier for the owner. We source our snake food from a company who humanely and ethically euthanizes their critters for the purpose of feeding snakes. If the snake breeder fed live food, the transition to still defrosted can take time to adapt to. As delicate of a topic this can be, we must remember the snake has dietary obligations to meet as well.

How often and what size should we feed? The average is every 5 to 7 days. Variables would be age, size of prey, and shedding cycle. A good way to know if a snake is ready to eat is by observing your snake's activity. Snakes are generally still and quiet. When you notice your snake active and alert moving around, it is typically a sign they are hungry. Another good tell is their fecal or shed cycle. Feel confident they are hungry if they've just finished either.

Size of the prey does matter. Do not feed anything wider than the girth of the snake. When conditioning snake to eat defrosted feeding smaller prey can lead to more success. Don't feed a snake if their eyes are cloudy or shedding, the snake is at a vulnerable point.



Now that we know why we feed frozen mice or rats, the next question is - how?

Feeding your snake can be the most exciting part of owning one. That being said it can also be the most difficult. The level of vivaciousness during feeding is the level of difficulty you will encounter when owning a snake. If the snake is a good eater, simply placing the thawed mouse/rat in a separate feeding container with the snake can be enough; however a lot of the times it isn't that simple. Later below we will list every tip and trick there are to "enticing" your snake to eat his dinner.

Before that let's get a feel for the general process. First take your airtight sealed bag of fuzzy popsicles, and thaw them out in the fridge overnight, or to expedite the process thaw in lukewarm water until soft. **Never** microwave a mouse/rat to thaw as this can lead to hot pockets within the feed that can seriously injure your snake. While the critter is thawing, about 30 minutes before the food is ready, place your pet snake in a separate "feeding cage". This container should be smaller than his living cage and ideally heated to the same temperature as his home. It is critical to wash your hands after handling any prey to rinse the scent off yourself. The snake can confuse scents and accidentally strike you. After the food is thawed and the snake has settled into the feeding chamber, use long stainless steel tongs and maneuver the dinner in front of the snake slowly. If you have a good eater, the snake will strike and your job is done. Wait five to thirty minutes for the snake to swallow and digest their food. This timing will depend on each particular snake, but when your pet is looking alert and flicking their tongue, it usually means your pet is ready for round two! You want to feed as much as your snake will eat. When they are full they will become disinterested in the thawed mouse and avoid it entirely.

If your snake doesn't have an appetite or seem interested in the food, there are several steps to persuade a healthy eating schedule.

- On feeding day increase temperature and humidity of the snakes home enclosure. The routine of this every week can condition your pet to know that day is for feeding day! Soaking or bathing in tepid water can help hydration and appetite.
- Decrease handling to absolute minimum the day of feeding. Over handling your pet can sometimes stress the snake discouraging appetite.
- Add "live/soiled bedding" (the paper material mice/rats live on) within the thawing bag to marinate the prey. Any local pet store should have abundance they can give to you free of charge. Remove any bedding stuck on the thawed food before you feed. The live scent should rub off and entice the snake to eat.



- Place some form of substrate/bedding inside the feeding chamber. Whether that be paper shreds that mimic long grass, or a pillowcase/cardboard box that act as a cave, snakes feel more confident striking prey if striking from cover.
- Try to feed warm food at live mouse body temperature.
- With long thin steel tongs, move the prey in a lifelike fashion similar to a wild animal. It can trick the snake increasing the chance it will strike.

With the above knowledge we can get even though most stubborn snakes to eat! If you continue to struggle with feeding and your snake does not eat from more than three weeks, consider a trip to the vet. Just remember having the proper environment for temperature and humidity along with low stress levels will be the largest factors in a healthy appetite. It can be difficult when first conditioning your snake to eat defrosted foods. Most snake owners can get their snakes to forever eat on its own after three to four attempts. You are always welcome to call the store if you have further questions.