herpy

SNAKES

Western Terrestrial Garter Snake

Thamnophis elegans

Thamnophis elegans is a slender, diurnal garter snake from western North America, where it lives from the Pacific coast to the mountains and open plains, usually not far from water. It is hardy and can live on thawed mice, but it slips out through the smallest gap and needs a completely secure enclosure. Its care is based on the closely related *Thamnophis sirtalis*.

Family: Colubridae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**50-105 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**6-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Beginner**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**100 × 50 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**23-27 °C**
Basking spot	**29-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**35-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**8-15 °C** 8-16 weeks
Diet	**Vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**18-30 months**
Litter size	**8-12 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**60-90 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE
Little is known about the care of *Thamnophis elegans* in captivity.

TEMPERATURE
There must be a clear heat gradient. The basking spot should be 29-32 °C measured at the surface, the cool end 23-27 °C and the night 18-22 °C. The heat source is switched off at night.

HUMIDITY AND WATER
Humidity should be 35-60 %, highest at the cool end and at night. The enclosure should not be wet, because constant dampness causes blisters on the belly.

LIGHTING AND UVB
The species is diurnal and thrives in strong daylight. UVB is not strictly necessary but is recommended and often makes the snake more active.

FEEDING
In the wild, *Thamnophis elegans* eats slugs, earthworms, salamanders, frogs and tadpoles, leeches, fish, lizards and small mammals.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING
Thamnophis elegans is quick and alert and usually becomes calm if handled regularly from a young age. Let new animals settle in for about two weeks, and begin handling them only once they are feeding steadily.

NATIVE RANGE
Canada, Mexico and United States.