herpy

SNAKES

Gophersnake

Pituophis catenifer

Pituophis catenifer is a powerful, diurnal colubrid from the prairies, deserts and woodland edges of North America. It grows to 1-2 metres, hunts rodents in their burrows and defends itself by hissing, inflating its neck and vibrating its tail, so that it resembles a rattlesnake. It is robust and easy to keep, but large, strong and an escape artist.

Family: Colubridae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**100-200 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**12-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert, savanna and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**28-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-24 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Not required**
Diet	**Vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**18-48 months**
Clutch size	**2-24 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**55-75 days** at 26-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult *Pituophis catenifer* needs an enclosure of at least 120 × 60 × 45 cm. Floor area is more important than height, because the species digs and explores, but rarely climbs.

TEMPERATURE

The species tolerates a wide temperature range. By day the enclosure should be 24-29 °C with a warm end of 28-32 °C and a cool end of 21-24 °C, so the snake can choose for itself, especially after a meal.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity does not matter much for the species, which comes from dry to moderately humid regions, and a specific figure is not documented.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Pituophis catenifer is diurnal, but does not need UVB light to stay healthy and rarely basks. An ordinary day-night rhythm of about 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness controlled by a timer is enough.

FEEDING

The species lives on rodents, and in captivity it is given frozen or thawed mice and rats. Do not give live rodents, which can bite the snake. The prey should be no wider than the snake at its widest point.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Pituophis catenifer is calm and curious, but has a dramatic defence. When threatened it inflates its body, hisses loudly, vibrates its tail and lunges forward with its mouth open or closed.

NATIVE RANGE

Canada, United States and Mexico.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/slanger/pituophis-catenifer