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SNAKES

Common Garter Snake

Thamnophis sirtalis

Thamnophis sirtalis is a slender, diurnal and curious snake with pale stripes along the body. It lives near water from southern Canada through most of the USA to northern Mexico. It is hardy, stays awake and visible by day and can live on thawed mice, but it is a master escape artist and needs a completely secure enclosure.

Family: Colubridae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**50-100 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	**18-24 months**
Litter size	**10-40 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
An adult *Thamnophis sirtalis* needs an enclosure of at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm (length × width × height), and a female over 80 cm needs 120 × 60 × 60 cm.

TEMPERATURE
There must be a clear heat gradient. The basking spot must be 29-32 °C measured on 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
The humidity must be 35-60 %, highest at the cool end and at night. The enclosure must not be wet, because persistent damp 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
Thamnophis sirtalis takes different prey from most snakes: earthworms, fish and rodents. It does not eat insects such as crickets and mealworms.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING
Thamnophis sirtalis is quick and curious and generally becomes tame if handled regularly from a young age. Let new animals settle in for about two weeks, and only begin handling them when they are feeding reliably.

NATIVE RANGE
Canada, Mexico and United States.